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THE GREATER MEN AND WOMEN OF THE BIBLE

EDITED BY THE REV.

JAMES HASTINGS, D.D.

EDITOR OF "THE EXPOSITORY TIMES" "THE DICTIONARY OF THE BIBLE"
"THE DICTIONARY OF CHRIST AND THE GOSPELS" AND
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HEZEKIAH.

He trusted in the Lord, the God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor among them that were before him.—2 Kings xviii. 5.

1. HEZEKIAH, King of Judah, was the son and successor of the feeble and superstitious Ahaz, with whom he contrasts as favourably as with his own son and successor Manasseh. He is conspicuous in Jewish history as the first king who is said to have attempted a reformation of religion on the principles which we find formally laid down in the Book of Deuteronomy. Special interest also attaches to his reign on account of his close personal connexion with the prophet Isaiah, who occasionally exerted a great influence over him (especially in the memorable crisis which issued in the deliverance of Jerusalem from Sennacherib), and also because of the strong light thrown upon his times by the cuneiform inscriptions as well as by extant prophecies.

2. The reign of Hezekiah marked an important era in the history of the Jews. That people had fallen into the very depths of idolatry and impurity of worship and life. They lay at the mercy of their foes, the Assyrians. The law of their God had been forgotten; the doors of His house had been closed. Altars to strange gods had been built in every corner of Jerusalem, and high places and Asherahs in every city of Judah. The spirit of iniquity was rampant in the land; the voice of religion was all but silent; and death and destruction seemed to be closing in on every side upon the ill-starred city of Jerusalem. But now Ahaz, the evil, is dead, and Hezekiah, his son, reigns in his stead. And of Hezekiah it is written that "after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor among them that were before him."

3. The difficulty of making any consistent chronological arrangement of the events of Hezekiah's reign is almost insuperable; but if we pass over some of the minor details of his life, two works loom forth from the background of the past, never-to-be-forgotten memorials of a man who was both great and good—his reformation of the national worship and his resolute stand against the national foe, the Assyrian, which we, at this distance, can see in their right perspective.

I.

The Religious Reformer.

1. It is hardly possible to exaggerate the unfavourable circumstances under which Hezekiah ascended the throne. Ahaz appears during his sixteen years' reign as the typically idolatrous king, a lover of foreign worships of every description — even burning his own son as a sacrifice to Moloch, erecting "altars in every corner of Jerusalem," and making shrines and high places to his various gods throughout his whole kingdom. Hezekiah succeeded to the throne at the early age of twenty-five, and he had been trained amid these degrading conditions. But he soon showed that he was no believer in the omnipotent moral power of heredity or circumstance. He had individual convictions concerning God and duty which he reached in spite of all the influences of family, of custom, and of education. Possibly the influence of Isaiah, disregarded by Ahaz and his advisers, had been secretly moulding the young prince before his accession.

¶ There is not a more striking instance of Divine mercy on the one hand, nor yet, on the other, of the personal character of religion even under the Old Testament, than that Ahaz should have been succeeded on the throne of Judah by Hezekiah. His name, "Strength of Jehovah," or, perhaps better, "God is might," was truly indicative of the character of his reign. In every respect—not only as regarded the king personally, but also in the results of his administration, as affecting his country and people—this period was in complete contrast to that which had immediately preceded it. . . . Ahaz had made himself tributary to

Assyria and held his crown almost at the mercy of the great world-empire. . . . As he had discarded the religion of Jehovah, so he despised His Word. Against the admonitions and warnings of the great prophet, who had assured him of Divine help, Ahaz had chosen to surrender to a foreign Power.

So matters stood when Hezekiah ascended the throne. Of all the political combinations possible to him, he chose none. He returned to the point from which Ahaz had departed. His policy was not to have any policy, but to trust in the living God, to obey His Word, and to follow His guidance. His policy was his religion, and his religion was true policy. The only occasion on which he was tempted to deviate from it was at a later time, and it well-nigh proved fatal to him, as in the sequel it certainly did to his successors. Not that Hezekiah neglected to avail himself of political combinations as they arose. Indeed, this became the source of his danger. He may have argued that not to make use of the means placed within his reach was fatalism, not faith. In this he erred. Yet he did not put his trust in such alliances. He treated them rather as means for defensive than as instruments sought for offensive purposes. The only real help which he sought was that of the living God. Thus religion was the central principle of his reign and the secret of his success.[1]

2. Hezekiah is introduced to us as a religious reformer by the compiler of the Chronicles; but this circumstantial account must be received with caution. According to the Chronicler, in the very first year of his reign the young king threw open the doors of the Temple, which had been closed by his father, assembled the priests and the Levites in front of the gates, and bade them sanctify themselves and then prepare to sanctify the house of the Lord, and to cleanse it and remove all the rubbish that had accumulated during the years it had been closed. This work was done in a thoroughly efficient manner by the Levites, whose zeal and labours put the priests to shame. Then there was a grand re-opening of the Temple. All the vessels that had been saved from the wreck were arranged before the altar, the lamps were lit once more, and the king made a great sin-offering for the transgressions of the people, and with burnt-offering commenced a glorious service of sacred music, which had been specially prepared for the occasion.

His next move was to restore the long neglected Passover to

[1] A. Edersheim.

its proper place. For he perceived that the Passover was set for the unity of the nation. It may be possible that he wished to bring back the ten tribes to the kingdom of Judah, but it is more probable that he desired the twelve tribes to worship Jehovah as one people, and so to remind them of their common inheritance and of their bond of religious unity at Jerusalem. Accordingly, he sent throughout all Israel to summon the Remnant to a solemn assembly at Jerusalem, in order that a general confession of sin might be made by all who had "escaped out of the hand of the kings of Assyria." The dwellers of Central Palestine had not learned the lessons of adversity, and they laughed to scorn the messengers of Hezekiah. Farther north the invitation met with a more favourable reception, and "divers of Asher and Manasseh and of Zebulun humbled themselves, and came to Jerusalem." The time occupied in assembling the people, and in the necessary purification of the priests, caused the celebration of the Passover to be postponed to the second month—a practice sanctioned by precedent in the days of wandering in the desert. The Passover-feast ended, a spirit of reforming fervour seized the people, and there was a general destruction of idolatrous images, altars, and high places, not only in Judah, but in Ephraim and Manasseh. At this time also the king reorganized the courses of priests and Levites, under "Azariah, chief priest of the house of Zadok," and took measures for the due collection and storage of tithes and first-fruits for the maintenance of the priesthood and the ordered services of the Temple. But the only part of these reforms that is recognized in the brief account of 2 Kings xviii. is the removal of "high places" and the destruction of "pillars" and "Asherah," and especially the destruction of the Nehushtan ("the brazen thing"), the serpent-image made by Moses in the wilderness, which had become the object of idolatrous worship.

¶ We may all ask ourselves if there is anything in our lives, worldly or spiritual, which we are cherishing and guarding, paying to it the adoration, worship, and love due only to God our Creator—anything we are making an idol of, burning incense to it, the clouds of smoke from which sometimes obscure, if only for a time, the true vision of our God and His will towards man. If so, let us ask God, that He will, in His infinite wisdom, bestow upon us the righteous zeal of Hezekiah, that we may utterly destroy and put away from us all hindrances to our love, and

worship, and service of God. Do we make the cross of Christ an idol while we forget His words, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me"?[1]

3. While it is generally admitted that Hezekiah paved the way for the reformation carried out by Josiah in the next century, not only prohibiting idolatry, but seeking to centralize the national worship by destroying the local sanctuaries in the provincial cities of Judah around which heathen practices were apt to gather, it is held by Wellhausen, W. R. Smith, Nowack, Stade, and others, that the reforms could have taken place only after the Assyrian invasion, which brought dishonour on the provinces but was the means of exalting Jerusalem and glorifying its protecting Deity, thus counteracting the idolatrous tendencies inherited from the previous reign. In proof that the reformation could not have been earlier, they cite the allusions to prevalent idolatry in such late prophecies of Isaiah as xxx. 22, xxxi. 7 (*c.* 702). These indeed show that the reformation had been far from perfect, being largely due to royal command; but the whole traditional account of Hezekiah's reign points to an earlier date for his turning to Jehovah.

We cannot tell the measure of Hezekiah's success, for what he effected was presently undone by Manasseh; but, at least, it was under him that the problem of religious reformation first took practical shape.

¶ Hezekiah was, so to speak, the first Reformer; the first of the Jewish Church to protest against institutions which had outlived their usefulness, and which the nation had outgrown. The uprooting of those delightful shades, the levelling of those consecrated altars, the destruction of that mysterious figure "which Moses had made in the wilderness," must have been a severe shock to the religious feelings of the nation. There was a widespread belief, which penetrated even to the adjacent countries, that the worship of Jehovah Himself had been abandoned, and that His support could no more be expected. Was it possible that the faith of the people could survive, when its most cherished relics were so rudely handled, when so little was left to sustain it for the future? So has the popular conservative instinct of every age been terrified at every reformation, and maintained, with the

[1] L. B., *What Is Truth?* 126.

alarmists of the time of Hezekiah, that, as one destructive step leads to another, we must have all or nothing. Hezekiah has been often quoted, and quoted justly, as an example that reform is not revolution, that Religion does not lose but gain by parting with needless incumbrances, however hallowed by long traditions or venerable associations.[1]

II.

The Nation's Defender.

Seven centuries before the birth of Christ, in the ninth year of Hoshea, King of Israel, Shalmaneser, King of Assyria, came up and besieged Samaria. So great was the strength of this city, both from its position among the hills and the pains which had been bestowed on the building of it, that it was able to withstand the siege for a period of three years. Under Sargon, the successor of Shalmaneser, however, it fell, and numberless Israelites were deported and placed in Halah and Habor, by the river of Gozan, and in the cities which the Assyrian kings had captured from the Medes; and a foreign population from Cuthah, and Hamath, and Sepharvaim, was poured into the cities of Israel. Thus the kingdom of Israel, as an independent kingdom, came to an end for ever. And now a like fate seemed to be awaiting Judah.

1. The Holy Land was situated much as Afghanistan is, which Lord Lytton once described as a pipkin between two brazen pots, which sooner or later must be crushed by the two strong Powers beside it. In Egypt supreme power was held by Tirhakah, a famous conqueror, who ruled what we call Upper Egypt and the Soudan. He was now threatening Assyria, which was governed by Sennacherib, whose armies were advancing to meet and crush him as a dangerous rival; and the little kingdom of Judah seemed to be a thorn in his side. Already the Assyrians had overrun the country, but Jerusalem and a few other fortified places still held out, and Sennacherib was not satisfied to leave the issue doubtful between himself and them. We can easily understand his reasoning. If Russia and Britain were at war, and the great northern

[1] A. P. Stanley, *History of the Jewish Church*, ii. 401.

Power was about to attack India, Afghanistan, though a feeble Power compared with these great empires, might, if hostile to Russia, make it almost impossible for her to advance; and therefore Russia would bend all her energies towards securing her friendship or her submission.

In Jerusalem, as there had been in the Northern Kingdom, there was a powerful party who posed as patriots, and they advocated the short-sighted policy of an alliance with Egypt. But the Egyptian forces were slow in arriving, and the Assyrians subdued and punished the Philistines and Arabians of Ekron and Sinai, and, turning against Judah, swept over the land, taking the fenced cities by storm, and compelling Hezekiah to sue for peace, and pay a heavy war indemnity, for which he was reduced to plunder the Temple of its treasures. The prophet Isaiah was always against this alliance with Egypt, or Ethiopia, and blamed Shebna, the king's adviser, for this foolish and disastrous policy.

¶ Egypt had a great reputation, and was a mighty promiser. Her brilliant antiquity had given her a habit of generous promise, and dazzled other nations into trusting her. Indeed, so full were Egyptian politics of bluster and big language that the Hebrews had a nickname for Egypt. They called her Rahab—*Stormy-speech, Blusterer, Braggart.* It was the term also for the crocodile, as being a *monster*, so that there was a picturesqueness as well as moral aptness in the name. Ay, says Isaiah, catching at the old name and putting to it another which describes Egyptian helplessness and inactivity, I call her *Rahab Sit-still, Braggart-that-sitteth-still, Stormy-speech, Stay-at-home. Blustering and inactivity, blustering and sitting still,* that is her character; *for Egypt helpeth in vain and to no purpose.* . . . Isaiah tracks the bad politics to their source in bad religion, the Egyptian policy to its roots in the prevailing tempers of the people. The Egyptian policy was doubly stamped. It was disobedience to the word of God; it was satisfaction with falsehood. The statesmen of Judah shut their ears to God's spoken word; they allowed themselves to be duped by the Egyptian Pretence.[1]

2. It was apparently at this time that Hezekiah was seized with what had every appearance of proving a fatal illness, and received from Isaiah the message: "Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live." The loss

[1] G. A. Smith, *Isaiah, i.–xxxix.*, 223.

of the king at this juncture would have been an irreparable blow to Judah, for as yet Hezekiah had no heir, and the safety of the State depended on its having at its head a strong and capable ruler, devoted to the pure worship of Jehovah. Hezekiah prayed earnestly that he might live, and "wept sore" at the thought of death. A poem is attributed to him on this occasion, and no gloomier view of death is taken in any part of the Old Testament. Hezekiah's hymn, preserved by Isaiah, is a model of psalm-writing, and shows us that the poetic form invented by David, which consisted of a rhythmical meditation of the soul on human injustice, its own backslidings and its hope in God, was very popular at the close of the eighth century.

Hezekiah's prayer was heard: a poultice of figs applied by the advice of Isaiah healed the tumour from which he was suffering, and the prophet could assure him that God had added fifteen years to his life. As a sign of the Divine favour, the shadow went back ten steps on the sundial of his father Ahaz.

¶ The dial was probably a pyramid of steps on the top of which stood a short pillar or obelisk. When the sun rose in the morning, the shadow cast by the pillar would fall right down the western side of the pyramid to the bottom of the lowest step. As the sun ascended the shadow would shorten, and creep up inch by inch to the foot of the pillar. After noon, as the sun began to descend to the west, the shadow would creep down the eastern steps; and the steps were so measured that each one marked a certain degree of time. It was probably afternoon when Isaiah visited the king. The shadow was going down according to the regular law; the sign consisted in causing the shadow to shrink up the steps again. Such a reversal of the ordinary progress of the shadow may have been caused in either of two ways: by the whole earth being thrown back on its axis, which we may dismiss as impossible, or by the occurrence of the phenomenon known as refraction. Refraction is a disturbance in the atmosphere by which the rays of the sun are bent or deflected from their natural course into an angular one. In this case, instead of shooting straight over the top of the obelisk, the rays of the sun had been bent down and inward, so that the shadow fled up to the foot of the obelisk. There are many things in the air which might cause this; it is a phenomenon often observed; and the Scriptural narratives imply that on this occasion it was purely local (2 Chron. xxxii. 31).[1]

[1] G. A. Smith, *Isaiah, i.–xxxix.*, 378.

But can it be, one suppliant tear
Should stay the ever-moving sphere?
A sick man's lowly breathëd sigh,
When from the world he turns away,
And hides his weary eyes to pray,
Should change your mystic dance, ye wanderers of the sky?

We too, O Lord, would fain command,
As then, Thy wonder-working hand,
And backward force the waves of Time,
That now so swift and silent bear
Our restless bark from year to year;
Help us to pause and mourn to Thee our tale of crime.

Bright hopes, that erst the bosom warm'd,
And vows, too pure to be perform'd,
And prayers blown wide by gales of care:—
These, and such faint half waking dreams,
Like stormy lights on mountain streams,
Wavering and broken all, athwart the conscience glare.

How shall we 'scape th' o'erwhelming Past?
Can spirits broken, joys o'ercast,
And eyes that never more may smile—
Can these th' avenging bolt delay,
Or win us back one little day
The bitterness of death to soften and beguile?

Time's waters will not ebb, nor stay,
Power cannot change them, but Love may;
What cannot be, Love counts it done.
Deep in the heart, her searching view
Can read where Faith is fix'd and true,
Through shades of setting life can see Heaven's work begun.[1]

3. An embassy from Merodach-baladan soon afterwards visited the king, ostensibly to congratulate him on his recovery, and "to inquire of the wonder that was done in the land" (especially interesting to the Babylonian sages), but really, no doubt, to sound him as to an alliance against Assyria. An embassy from so famous and distant a sovereign as Merodach-baladan was an extremely flattering acknowledgment of Hezekiah's importance in Palestine. Everything was evidently prepared in Jerusalem for war: the

[1] Keble, *The Christian Year* (1st Sunday after Christmas).

treasury and armoury were alike full, and Hezekiah gratified his pride by displaying them to the Babylonians: "there was nothing in all his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah shewed them not." Isaiah regarded the king's conduct with disapproval, and uttered the remarkable prediction: "Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store unto this day, shall be carried to Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the Lord. And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon."

¶ To the simple and incautious Hezekiah such a disclosure of his secret resources before the ambassadors of a prince whose reign had been a constant and unsuccessful struggle against Sargon, his own great enemy, seemed innocent and harmless. But Isaiah, his faithful counsellor, knew better than his master. The sudden rise and fall of Oriental empires was often startling. Their provinces were always ready to throw off the yoke imposed on them only by resistless violence. The life of Sargon, indeed, had been spent in putting down revolts, from Media to Tyre, from Armenia to Arabia. Merodach-baladan's tenacity in resistance showed a vitality in his claims which might hereafter reverse the relations between him and Nineveh. Above all, prophetic insight corroborated natural prescience. It had been revealed to the seer that Babylon would one day be supreme, and that Judah would then suffer for the vanity of Hezekiah, by utter ruin. Ever fearless in his duties as the servant of God, this could not be withheld, though Hezekiah was at once his friend and his king. Once more the black mantle of the prophet was seen in the private chamber of the palace, and the monarch had to listen while his reprover told him that he was sent from Jehovah to foretell the future destruction of the kingdom by that very power whose representatives had thus received the royal confidence. The palace would be plundered, the national wealth seized, and his own descendants carried off to be servants in the palace of the king of Babylon. The blow was heavy, but it fell on a heart duly humble. "Good is the word of Jehovah," replied the king, "which thou hast spoken"—an answer followed by the mitigating assurance that the catastrophe would not happen in his own days.[1]

4. Some years afterwards we find Sennacherib sending an embassy to Jerusalem, and completely ignoring the terms of his

[1] C. Geikie, *Hours with the Bible* (ed. 1890), iv. 423.

treaty with Jerusalem. The facts of this embassy are so obscure that we cannot determine whether it was that, when the Assyrians had withdrawn, the Jews had opened negotiations with Egypt and so provoked the hostility of Sennacherib, or that Sennacherib, having to subdue Libnah and Lachish, fortresses which might materially assist the approaching Tirhakah, King of Upper Egypt, did not wish to leave so formidable a city as Jerusalem in his rear and pretended to believe that the compact had been broken by Hezekiah.

From Lachish, Sennacherib sent a large detachment to Jerusalem, headed by the Tartan, or "General," of the host. They took up their position on the north of the city, on a spot long afterwards known as "the camp of the Assyrians." The General, accompanied by two high personages, known like himself through their official titles, "Head of the Cup-bearers" and "Head of the Eunuchs," approached the walls, and came to the same spot where, many years before, Isaiah had met Ahaz. Hezekiah feared to appear. In his place came Eliakim, now chief minister, Shebna, now in the office of secretary, and Joah, the royal historian. The Rabshakeh, as spokesman, showed himself to be an overbearing and insolent man, but at the same time possessed of a shrewd knowledge of the weak points of the character of the Judæans. He opened the discussion by asking what had induced Hezekiah to resist his master. Did he trust in Egypt? It was like trusting "upon the staff of a bruised reed . . . whereon if a man lean it will go into his hand, and pierce it." Did he trust in Jehovah? The Rabshakeh appealed to the disaffected party in Judah, who doubtless regarded Hezekiah as a sacrilegious fanatic for removing the ancient sanctuaries, and asked: "Is not that he, whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah hath taken away, and hath said to Judah and to Jerusalem, Ye shall worship before this altar in Jerusalem?" The ministers of Hezekiah, afraid of the forcible effect of these taunts on the people, besought the Rabshakeh to speak in the Aramæan dialect, the diplomatic language of all Syria, and not to use the Jewish tongue; but the Assyrian officer was too astute to consent to this. He turned to the people on the wall, and, addressing them in coarse language suited to the rude soldiers, he called on them to surrender their city and to come into a better land and a wealthier

home, which Sennacherib would give them in exchange for their patrimony.

The Rabshakeh's speech was received by the people in dead silence. The three ministers tore their garments in horror, and appeared in that state before the king. He, too, gave way to an uncontrolled burst of grief. Then he sent for Isaiah, from whom he heard words of comfort and encouragement, and his heart was strengthened against Sennacherib, and the messengers of that monarch withdrew without having effected their purpose.

Having no spare troops to detach for the siege of Jerusalem, Sennacherib trusted to the effect of a violent letter to Hezekiah ordering him to surrender the place. Hezekiah took the letter, and penetrating, as it would seem, into the most Holy Place, laid it before the Divine Presence enthroned above the cherubim, and called upon Him whose name it insulted, to look down and see with His own eyes the outrage that was offered to Him. From that dark recess no direct answer was vouchsafed. The answer came through the inspired prophet. Isaiah entered, and uttered his magnificent defiance of Assyria — one of the treasures of religious literature. In the prophetic words which are embodied in the narrative we have for the most part genuine utterances of Isaiah, harmonizing with that "most beautiful of all his discourses" which marks the peaceful and triumphant close of his ministry, and which finds an echo in the 46th, perhaps also in the 48th, 75th, and 76th Psalms. The prophet's words had a terrible fulfilment. "It came to pass that night, that the angel of the Lord went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred and fourscore and five thousand."

No record of Sennacherib's expedition and its disastrous issue is preserved on the Assyrian monuments, and the Biblical account is full of difficulties. But the Biblical account finds an echo in the story told by Herodotus (ii. 141), the destruction of the Assyrian army being probably due to a plague in the pestiferous region on the borders of Egypt where the Crusaders and others have had a similar experience. Though its historical character has been much criticized, the story is one of the most vividly dramatic narratives in the Old Testament, and the way in which Jerusalem escaped destruction was the culminating triumph both

of Isaiah's long prophetic career, and of the chequered reign of Hezekiah.

¶ The miracle of Jerusalem's deliverance was not that by faith the prophet Isaiah foretold it, but that by faith he did actually himself succeed in bringing it to pass. The miracle, we say, was not that Isaiah made accurate prediction of the city's speedy relief from the Assyrian, but far more that upon his solitary steadfastness, without aid of battle, he did carry her disheartened citizens through this crisis of temptations, and kept them, though silent, to their walls till the futile Assyrian drifted away. We may recall the parallel case of Charlemagne in his campaign against the Moors in Spain, from which he was suddenly and unseasonably hastened north on a disastrous retreat by news of the revolt of the Saxons. In the vast Assyrian territories rebellions were constantly occurring that demanded the swift appearance of the king himself; and God's Spirit, to whose inspiration Isaiah traced all political perception, suggested to him the possibility of one of these. In the end, the Bible story implies that it was not a rumour from some far-away quarter so much as a disaster here in Syria which compelled Sennacherib's "retreat from Moscow." But it is possible that both causes were at work, and that as Napoleon offered the receipt of news from Paris as his reason for hurriedly abandoning the unfortunate Spanish campaign of 1808, so Sennacherib made the rumour of some news from his capital or the north the occasion for turning his troops from a theatre of war where they had not met with unequivocal success, and had at last been half destroyed by the plague.[1]

5. Little else is recorded of Hezekiah, who died some three or four years after the great deliverance. His life was not without its mistakes, but they did not proceed from impure motives. His faults resulted from temperament rather than from design. There was a want of reserve towards the court of Babylon, when its representatives came to congratulate him on his recovery. He needlessly showed them the wealth of his house and the glory of his kingdom. This excited their greed, and hastened the doom of Jerusalem. We do not favour his reply to the prophet when he announced the fall of his kingdom: "Good is the word of the Lord which thou hast spoken—is it not so?—if peace and truth be in my days." Too prone was he to personal ease, and too little alive to the future of his dynasty. Happily this is all — this

[1] G. A. Smith, *Isaiah, i.-xxxix.*, 354.

amiable weakness—the sacred narrative contains of doubtful matter; in all other respects he stands before us in the garb of spotless integrity.

Hezekiah appears from an incidental notice in Prov. xxv. 1 to have been a patron of literature. Probably some of the other writings of the Old Testament were also compiled and arranged at this time by the royal scribes. His work is noted also in fortifying Jerusalem—especially the reservoir which he constructed in the Tyropœan valley by bringing thither by an underground "conduit" the water from Gihon. His only military operations seem to have been those in the early part of his reign against the Philistines. He was succeeded in 697 by his son Manasseh.

¶ The personal character and endowments of Hezekiah were illustrious. Ready for war when necessary, and alike brave and skilful in its conduct, he was more inclined to the gentle arts of peace. Though he could wrest cities from the Philistines and defend Jerusalem with resolution and ability, he gave his heart rather to the promotion of the internal welfare of his kingdom. His tender religious sensibility, and poetic genius — the first instance of the latter since David—are seen in the hymn which he composed after his recovery from almost mortal sickness. His love of culture displayed itself in his zeal for the preservation of the religious writings of his nation, of which their literature to a great extent consisted. Descended, apparently on his mother's side, from Zechariah, the favourite prophet of Uzziah, he inherited a lofty enthusiasm for the ancient faith. In direct contrast to his father, who had zealously favoured everything Assyrian, Hezekiah gave himself passionately to whatever was national, and devoted his life to the restoration of the worship of Jehovah and the purification of the land from the heathenism which Ahaz had introduced. The "Law" was his guiding star in public and private. The prophets were his honoured and cherished counsellors. He was intelligent and refined as he was humble and godly. Jewish tradition, magnifying his fame and merits in after years, fancied that he must have been the promised Messiah; and the inspired compiler of the Second Book of Kings only reflects the universal homage of contemporary public opinion in the grand eulogium, that "he trusted in the Lord God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him."[1]

[1] C. Geikie, *Hours with the Bible* (ed. 1890), iv. 330.

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EZRA.

For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgements.—Ezra vii. 10.

1. THE Books of Ezra and Nehemiah were originally one, and ought really to be so combined now. The evidence of this is overwhelming. Two points suffice for a demonstration: (1) The story of Ezra is partly in one book, Ezra vii. 10, and partly in the other, Neh. vii. 70–viii. 12. In 1 Esd. these two parts are united in a single book. (2) At the end of each book of the Old Testament there are certain Massoretic notes, giving the number of verses, the middle point in the volume or roll, etc. There are no such notes at the end of Ezra, and those at the end of Nehemiah cover both books, showing that the two constituted a single work when these notes were made.

It is also generally admitted that Ezra and Nehemiah, which are the direct continuation of Chronicles, originally formed part of that work. Not only is their style—which is very marked, and in many respects unlike that of any other book of the Old Testament—closely similar, but they also resemble each other in the point of view from which the history is treated, in the method followed in the choice of materials (genealogies, statistical registers, descriptions of religious ceremonies, details respecting the sacerdotal classes, and the organization of public worship). Moreover, the Book of Ezra-Nehemiah begins exactly at the point at which the Book of Chronicles ends, and carries on the narrative upon the same plan to the time when the theocratic institutions under which the compiler lived were finally established through the labours of Ezra and Nehemiah.

2. Though the author breathes much of his own spirit into the history he records, he fortunately leaves much of it practically intact and often transcribes without adapting. This is

especially true of the long section Neh. i.–vi., a graphic story in the first person, which comes from the personal memoirs of Nehemiah. It is also clear that one of the sources was the memoirs of Ezra, for the sections Ezra vii. 27–viii. 34 and ix. 1–15 speak of him in the first person, though the abrupt transition in the tenth chapter from the first person to the third shows the hand of the editor working on the original documents. It is not impossible that he may have edited even that portion of the memoirs which has been preserved in the first person. We do know for a fact that he retouched documents which look like originals. A comparison, for instance, of the decree of Cyrus as given in Ezra i. 2 ff. with the form of that decree preserved in the Aramaic document of Ezra vi. 3 ff. leaves no doubt as to which is the original. The Chronicler's hand is obvious in the representation of the decree as a charge given by Jehovah, God of heaven, to Cyrus. Thus we have to face the possibility, which amounts to a practical certainty, that the Chronicler's hand has touched even the original letters and documents preserved in Aramaic, Ezra iv. 8–vi. 14 and vii. 12–26, but the influence there is, in the main, formal rather than material.

3. The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah embrace the period from the return of the exiles under Zerubbabel (B.C. 537) to the second visit of Nehemiah (B.C. 432); but the history is not told continuously. Indeed, no attempt is made to supply a consecutive narrative. There are long periods on which the narrative is silent; in one case especially (Ezra vi. 22–vii. 1), an interval of sixty years, immediately before Ezra's own time, is passed over by the words, "After these things," in a manner not credible if the writer were Ezra himself, but perfectly natural if the writer lived in an age to which the period B.C. 516–458 was visible only in a distant perspective. It is confined chiefly to certain periods or occasions of importance, viz. the Return, and events immediately following it (B.C. 536), the rebuilding of the Temple (B.C. 520–16), and the visits of Ezra and Nehemiah in B.C. 458, 444, and 432.

But the story told by Ezra-Nehemiah, however defective in continuity, is complete in intention. It tells of slow successive steps in a uniform process, that of making Jerusalem into a "holy

city" not only in respect of such sacred buildings as Ezekiel designed in vision, or such boundary walls as Nehemiah erected, but by virtue of dismissing from among its inhabitants first of all "strange women of the peoples of the land," then "all the mixed multitude," which had more or less companied with the children of Israel since the days of the Exodus. These reforms, instituted by the leaders of the Return, were embodied in covenants of increasing stringency, which formed the documentary basis of what was virtually a changed religion—no longer Mosaism with its tolerance of the stranger, or Prophetism with its desire to evangelize the heathen, but Judaism with its self-protective holiness keeping off the nations at arm's length.

I.

The Return to Jerusalem.

With Ezra, it has been said, one stands at the cradle of Judaism. In Jewish tradition he figures as a second Moses. His was the hand that gave a new and lasting shape to the least plastic of all materials that ever reformer had to work upon—the character of the Jewish people. He was the man of his age who set an indelible mark on succeeding ages. If Ezra's great reputation rested solely on what is told of him in the Canonical books, his title to it might be called in question. He certainly appears in those books as a man of sincere piety, of unselfish patriotism, and of unbending firmness of will; but the actual outcome of his reforming energy does not seem very remarkable even where he succeeded, which was not at every point of the line. It would be strange indeed if the comparatively narrow aims which history ascribes to this man had led to such broad results as appear in the whole future development of Judaism. Since the results are undeniably there, and since Jewish opinion is unanimous in attributing them to his influence and activity, one has to conclude that the meagre, disjointed notices of Ezra's career in the Canonical books give a most inadequate conception of what he was, and of what he did for his people. Those autobiographic and biographic fragments, which unfortunately are all that the Jewish chronicler saw fit to preserve, have to be read in the light of the verdict

pronounced by posterity upon the man and his labours. They give a certain insight into Ezra's motives and methods, but they leave much untold.

1. The Jewish nation had been almost destroyed by the armies of Nebuchadnezzar, at the close of the seventh century B.C. The Jews were carried away captives, after the custom of the Chaldæans, and taken to Babylon; and there they remained, a people in a strange land, for seventy years. After the capture of Babylon by Cyrus, and through the interposition of Daniel, the captive Israelites were permitted to return to their own land, under the leadership of Zerubbabel. The return from captivity was a trying experience to them. It was one of the transition epochs in a people's history which bring out either the best or the worst in their nature. For a time, it seemed as though their long detention in a foreign land had purged them from idolatry and religious indifference. The work of rebuilding the Temple was carried out by Zerubbabel and the priests; the ritual and ceremonies of the old religion were reinstituted; and a brief period of zeal lighted up the nation. Then a reaction followed: long years of deterioration ensued, and the State seemed to drift towards apostasy once more. The Jews began to intermarry with their heathen neighbours; the Sabbath was neglected; the Temple services and sacrifices were forgotten by great numbers; and general demoralization took place.

¶ Many run from one extreme to another, from licentiousness to the ecstasy of religious feeling, from religious feeling back to licentiousness, not without a "fearful looking for of judgment." If we could trace the hidden workings of good and evil, they would appear far less surprising and more natural than as they are seen by the outward eye. Our spiritual nature is without spring or chasm, but it has a certain play or freedom which leads very often to consequences the opposite of what we expect. It seems in some instances as if the same religious education had tended to contrary results; in one case to a devout life, in another to a reaction against it.[1]

2. Nearly sixty years pass without any record, and then another colony went back from Babylon to Jerusalem, led by

[1] B. Jowett, *Epistles of St. Paul*, i. 169.

Ezra the scribe. He was a man of inherited greatness; among his ancestors was that chief priest Seraiah who fell victim at Riblah to the vengeance of Nebuchadnezzar, and farther back that Hilkiah who discovered in the Temple the Book of Deuteronomy. But besides being of priestly family, this Ezra was "a ready scribe in the law of Moses," and that not as a mere legalist, but as one who "set his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments." The name "scribe" (*Sôpher*) denoted under the monarchy an official of the court, a State secretary. After the fall of the monarchy, it had the meaning of a student of Scripture, copying, compiling, and commenting upon it. Ezra the "ready scribe in the law of Moses" was not a mere copyist, nor the author of the law, but a diligent student of the law.

3. Ezra heard of the apostasy in progress in Jerusalem, and longed to go and put the law into effect there, to establish a real hagiocracy, "the law" being the supreme authority in civil and religious affairs alike. Artaxerxes was not so tolerant of foreign religions as Cyrus had been; nevertheless Ezra won his goodwill, and secured a royal edict, clothing him with ample authority to carry out his purpose. This edict has been preserved in Aramaic (Ezra vii. 12–26); and while many regard this as a Jewish version, it is in the main trustworthy. All Jews who felt so inclined were free to depart from Babylon; Ezra was authorized to carry the offerings for the Temple made by the king and by the Jews; to purchase sacrificial animals, and to use the rest of the money as he and his brethren saw fit; to draw upon the royal treasury in the province of Syria for further necessary supplies; to exempt the Temple officers and servants from the Persian tax; to appoint officers to execute the law of God, teaching such as were unacquainted with it; and to enforce the law of God and of the Persian king by penalty even to fines, imprisonment, banishment or death.

He accordingly left Babylon, where the king had been holding his winter court, on the first of Nisan, or March (B.C. 458), the seventh year of the new reign. Nine days after his departure he reviewed the Jews who had decided to accompany him to Jerusalem, at a place called Ahava, possibly the modern Hit.

But he found no Levites among them, and accordingly sent to Casiphia—a village of unknown situation—to Iddo, and "his brethren the Nethinim," bidding them bring ministers for the house of God. Thirty-eight Levites soon afterwards joined him along with two hundred and twenty Nethinim, and a fast was proclaimed on the banks of the river or canal of Ahava, for the purpose of asking God to protect the caravan on its way to Syria. After fasting and praying for a safe journey, the company set out, and in four months reached the Holy City.

4. Ezra had now entered on his great work of reform. To his absolute consternation he found that already every wall of separation had been broken down between Israel and the Canaanites round about, till both the domestic life and the public life of Jerusalem was in nothing but in name to be distinguished from the abominations of the nations that their fathers had been brought out of Egypt to avenge and to root out. The priests, the Levites, and the laity had alike made affinity with the heathen population of Canaan, the princes and rulers being "chief in the trespass." The horror and astonishment of Ezra on hearing of this lapse from purity of blood led him to make a solemn national confession of sin with every mark of humiliation and earnestness. He entreated God for the "remnant that is escaped," that they might not forfeit their newly acquired place in the Divine favour and be consumed—this time without an escape—by reason of their renewed guilt. His confession was echoed by a very great congregation gathered in the Temple courts, and amid general weeping Shecaniah, one of the company, having himself relations compromised by mixed marriages (x. 2), came forward with a proposal to take active measures immediately, and ask "the chief priests, the Levites, and all Israel" to "make a covenant" with God to put away their Canaanitish wives.

This sacrifice, so proposed, Ezra judged to be necessary, and demanded it under oath of the congregation then present. An assembly was summoned of all the children of the Captivity. A pathetic picture is drawn of a stormy December day, of men trembling at the great rain and at their own trespass, agreeing with evident reluctance to the separation demanded, but asking for such delay as should secure a judicial treatment of details.

After three months' labour, and not without opposition apparently, the work of the court was finished, and many innocent women and children were cast out, as Hagar and Ishmael had been.

Ezra declared this to be the Divine will. It was certainly an action that could be justified only by extreme circumstances. To an impartial onlooker it might seem high-handed, harsh, even cruel. But there could be no doubt as to the perfect purity and integrity of his motives. Unlike most of his adversaries, he had no personal interest in the dispute—no selfish ends to gain. His one ambition was to glorify God and to be of service to his nation. He plunged into this controversy with all the passionate intensity of conviction which belonged to him alike by temperament and by training. But for this unquestionable sincerity, the means he took to bring home to the people his sense of their guilt and danger might have been thought to savour of the theatrical. The scene prepared for them was in the highest degree dramatic; but Ezra's part in it, though not perhaps unstudied, was certainly not acted. He was in deadly earnest; and his vehement expressions of horror and alarm, exaggerated as they might appear, were the natural outcome of what he really felt and believed.

¶ In passionate earnestness, Baxter seems without a peer among modern preachers. He could consistently plead with preachers to take their work seriously. "Whatever you do," he says, "let the people see you are in good earnest. Truly, brethren, they are great works which have to be done, and you must not think that trifling will despatch them. You cannot break men's hearts by jesting with them, or telling them a smooth tale, or pronouncing a gaudy vision. Men will not cast away their dearest pleasure at the drowsy request of one that seemeth not to mean as he speaks, or to care much whether his request be granted or not. With the most of our hearers, the very pronunciation and tone of speech is a great point. The best matter will scarcely move them, if it be not movingly delivered."[1]

[1] G. Eayrs, *Richard Baxter and the Revival of Preaching*, 47.

II.

The Institution of the Law.

1. A blank of thirteen years now intervenes in the history of Ezra and the Jewish people. When we hear of them again it is in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes (B.C. 446), when Nehemiah, a Babylonian Jew and the favoured cup-bearer of Artaxerxes, asked the king's permission to revisit his native city and to repair its ruined walls. According to the compiler of Ezra-Nehemiah, it was after this event that Ezra read the Law to the people assembled at Jerusalem, and obtained their pledge to observe it. It is singular that Ezra, who had brought the Law to Jerusalem for the purpose of making it the code of the community, should not have promulgated it sooner. It may be that Stade is right in supposing that Ezra had aroused the hostility of the people by the compulsory divorce, and that the times were not ripe before; or it may be that the chronology is not exact, as the compilation was made long after the events described, and the description of the reading of the Law interrupts Nehemiah's narrative. The compiler himself seems uncertain as to the connexion in which he should introduce the coming of the book. By repeating in his prefatory note (Neh. vii. 73, viii. 1) the words of Ezra iii. 1, he suggests a connexion with the first Return; while by an earlier mention of the Law of God in the hand of Ezra he connects it with the first arrival of that personage from Babylon. But the time of the occurrence is far less important than the occurrence itself.

The completion of the walls had doubtless rekindled the national enthusiasm of the Jews, and revived their desire to maintain their distinctive character as a "peculiar people." Ezra's public appearance with the Book of the Law in his hands was evidently the response to a popular demand. An opportunity had at last arrived for carrying out his cherished object and reorganizing the national life on the basis of the Law-book which had been brought from Babylon, but which had hitherto been known only to the priesthood.

¶ The law that Ezra published to the people consisted, as we

suppose, of the final expansion of the people's Book of the Law; with Deuteronomist Law and Jehovist-Elohist Narrative had now been combined the Priestly Narrative and the Priestly Laws. The publication of the work heralded a radical change in the religious life of the people. The People's Book was no longer to be confined to the prophetic re-formulation of laws, which had once so deeply aroused Jewish thought and influenced Jewish literature. The priesthood was no longer alone to possess the key of knowledge as to the clean and the unclean, the true worship and the false (cf. Ezek. xliv. 23, 24). Their hereditary monopoly was to be done away. The instruction of the people was to pass from the priest to the scribe. Not what "the Law" was, but what its meaning was, was henceforth to call for authoritative explanation. The Law itself was to be in the hands of the people.

The conjuncture was a critical one for the history of Judaism. There was a sharp division between the High Priest's party and the supporters of Ezra. The records of Ezra and Nehemiah leave us in no practical doubt on the point. The priests were foremost in supporting a policy of free intercourse with the heathen, of fraternizing, for the sake of material advantages, with the leaders of the Samaritans (cf. Ezra ix. 1, 2, x. 18–22, Neh. vi. 10–14, xiii. 4–14, 28). The opposition of Ezra and the energetic action of Nehemiah averted the evil effects of this policy. But it is probable that, if the patriotic enthusiasm of the people had not been awakened by Nehemiah's successful restoration of the walls, Ezra and his colleagues would not have been strong enough, in the face of the priests, to establish upon a firm footing the public recognition of a larger Canon of Scripture. The far-reaching effect of their action may not then have been so obvious as the immediate advantage to be obtained. The immediate advantage was that a knowledge of the Priestly Law was placed within the reach of every Jew, and that a fatal barrier was thus raised against any attempt at fusion with the stranger and the Samaritan. The far-reaching effect was that a standard of holy and unholy, right and wrong, clean and unclean, was delivered to the Jews as a people, so that all Jews, whether of the Dispersion or in Judea, whether in Babylon or in Alexandria or within the walls of Jerusalem, could equally know the will of the Lord, and equally interpret the difficulties of moral and social life by appeal to the "Torah," to the verdict, not given by the mouth of the priest or the prophet, but obtained by search into the letter of "the Law."[1]

[1] H. E. Ryle, *The Canon of the Old Testament*, 81.

2. On the first day of the civil year (Tisri 1), a great assembly was held for the purpose of hearing the contents of the new code. Standing on the pulpit of wood, Ezra read the book aloud in the audience of the people "from early morning until midday," the lections being occasionally interrupted by parenthetic comments and explanations. The effect on the audience was remarkable. They broke forth into lamentations at hearing "the words of the law," which as a nation they had in so many particulars transgressed. But grief was unsuited to the "holiness" of such a day. Nehemiah bade them depart in peace, and celebrate the feast with gladness. "Neither be ye grieved," he said, "for the joy of Jehovah is your strength."

This joy was put into further practice by keeping the Feast of Tabernacles; the olive, myrtle, pine, and palm branches, commanded in Lev. xxiii., were procured, and booths were constructed on house-tops and in courtyards and streets, "for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun had not the children of Israel done so." The feast lasted the prescribed time of eight days, and each day Ezra continued to read extracts from the Law. This revival of religious feeling was clinched by the holding of a day of fasting and confession of sin on the 24th of the same month. Three hours were devoted to hearing the Scriptures read, three to confessing their trespasses and worshipping the Lord. Then Ezra came forward with a prayer of particular beauty and fulness (Neh. ix. 6–38). He commemorated all the wonderful dealings of God with Israel as their national Founder (vv. 7, 8), their Redeemer from slavery (vv. 9–12), their Lawgiver at Mount Sinai, their Preserver in the Wilderness, the Conqueror of Canaan, their Deliverer from invading tribes, and their Educator, who with infinite patience had sought to bring them again to His law, when they "dealt proudly," slew His prophets, and "hardened their neck." Ezra finally prayed God that all the discipline of exile past and servitude present might not be fruitless; and for that purpose he set forth "a sure covenant" which the princes, Levites and priests sealed and the rest of the community accepted on oath.

3. This covenant—"to walk in God's law"—specified seven points of strict observance. As reported in Neh. x., these are:

(1) to abstain from all intermarriage with heathen peoples; (2) to abstain from buying and selling on the Sabbath or on a holy day; (3) to observe the commands respecting the Sabbatical year; (4) to pay a poll tax of one-third of a shekel to support the services at the Temple; (5) to provide wood for the sacrifices at the Temple in accordance with the decision of the lot; (6) to bring the first-fruits and the first-born, as commanded, to the Temple for the support of the priests; (7) to deliver the tithes of the ground to the Levites, who in turn were to distribute them according to the Law; and, in general, not to neglect to provide for the needs of the Temple service. The trustworthiness of this brief report is strikingly confirmed by the fact that each regulation was intended to correct evils in the Judæan community with which we have become familiar through the memoirs of Nehemiah and the writings of contemporary prophets. There is good ground for believing that the reformation affected the inner spiritual as well as the external life of the community; but it was natural that a tradition, probably preserved among the records of the Temple, should refer only to objective reforms. The articles subscribed to at the Great Assembly became at once the constitution, both of Judaism and of the new Temple service.

¶ The exterior aspect of the stern, strict Judaism of these days is by no means attractive. But the interior life of it is simply superb. It recognizes the absolute supremacy of God. In the will of God it acknowledges the one unquestionable authority before which all who accept His covenant must bow; in the revealed truth of God it perceives an inflexible rule for the conduct of His people. To be pledged to allegiance to the will and law of God is to be truly consecrated to God. That is the condition voluntarily entered into by the citizens of Jerusalem in this epoch of religious awakening. A few centuries later their example was followed by the primitive Christians, who, according to the testimony of the two Bithynian handmaidens tortured by Pliny, solemnly pledged themselves to lives of purity and righteousness; again, it was imitated, though in strangely perverted guise, by anchorites and monks, by the great founders of monastic orders and their loyal disciples, and by mediæval reformers of Church discipline such as St. Bernard; still later it was followed more closely by the Protestant inhabitants of Swiss cities at the Reformation, by the early Independents at home and the Pilgrim Fathers in New England, by the Covenanters in Scot-

land, by the first Methodists. It is the model of Church order, and the ideal of the religious organization of civic life. But it awaits the adequate fulfilment of its promise in the establishment of the Heavenly City, the New Jerusalem.[1]

4. That first of Tisri, when Ezra stood up on his tribune in the square before the Water-gate, and read the Law of Moses to the congregation, may be called the birthday of Judaism. It is scarcely possible to exaggerate the "epoch-making importance" of that occasion, which closed the long history of ancient Israel, inaugurated the era of reform, and gave a new impulse and direction to the development of the national consciousness. The Jewish people often halted in the path on which they entered that day, sometimes even seemed to retrace their steps; but they never really diverged from that path into any other—never transferred to any other authority the allegiance they had sworn to the Law.

¶ This is a characteristic of the religion of law; it is a bondage, though a bondage willingly submitted to by those who stoop to its yoke. To St. Paul it became a crushing slavery. But the burden was not felt at first, simply because neither the range of the Law, nor the searching force of its requirements, nor the weakness of men to keep their vows, was yet perceived by the sanguine Jews who so unhesitatingly surrendered to it. As we look back to their position from the vantage ground of Christian liberty, we are astounded at the Jewish love of law, and we rejoice in our freedom from its irksome restraints. And yet the Christian is not an antinomian; he is not a sort of free lance, sworn to no obedience. He too has his obligation. He is bound to a lofty service—not to a law, indeed, but to a personal Master; not in the servitude of the letter, but, though with the freedom of the spirit, really with far higher obligations of love and fidelity than were ever recognized by the most rigorous covenant-keeping Jews. Thus he has a new covenant, sealed in the blood of his Saviour, and his communion with his Lord implies a sacramental vow of loyalty. The Christian covenant, however, is not visibly exhibited, because a formal pledge is scarcely in accordance with the spirit of the gospel. We find it better to take a more self-distrustful course, one marked by greater dependence of faith on the preserving grace of God, by turning our vows into prayers. While the Jews "entered into a curse and into an oath" to keep

[1] W. F. Adeney, *Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther*, 11.

the Law, we shrink from anything so terrible; yet our duty is not the less because we limit our professions of it.[1]

5. Ezra must have died during Nehemiah's first tenure of office. The chief part of his literary labours must have been accomplished during the thirteen years that elapsed between the close of his own narrative and the beginning of that of Nehemiah. They were years of official repose, in which he would have been able to collect and arrange the earlier books of the Old Testament, and more especially the Book of the Law. How little these were known to the community at large appears from the narrative of Nehemiah. The words of the Law came to the Jews with the force of a new revelation when they heard them read by Ezra after Nehemiah's arrival in Jerusalem. Possibly Ezra's work of collection and arrangement was but just finished, and he had had no previous opportunity of making known to his countrymen the injunctions of their inspired lawgiver. We need not believe the legend in the Second Book of Esdras (iv. 21–47), that he and his five companions re-wrote the Law which had been burnt, or the tradition of the Talmud, which ascribes the revision of the Old Testament to Ezra and "the men of the Great Synagogue"; but it is scarcely probable that a fact does not underlie both the legend and the tradition, and that the preservation of much of the text of the sacred volume is, humanly speaking, due to the labours of the great scribe.

To secure the worship of God, free from all contamination—this was Ezra's ultimate purpose. In accomplishing it he must have a devoted people also free from contamination, a priesthood still more separate and consecrated, and a ritual carefully guarded and protected from defilement. To a Christian all this has its defects—formalism, externalism, needless narrowness. Yet it succeeded in saving the religion of the Jews, and in transmitting that religion to future ages as a precious casket containing the seed of the great spiritual faith for which the world was waiting. There is something of the schoolmaster in Ezra; but he is, like the Law he loved so devoutly, a schoolmaster who brings us to Christ. He was needed both for his times and also in order to lay the foundation of coming ages.

[1] W. F. Adeney, *Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther*, 309.

¶ The Law was something more than a system of restraint and condemnation. It contained an element of progress. Under the tutelage of his pedagogue the boy is growing up to manhood. At the end of its term the Law will hand over its charge mature in capacity and equal to the responsibilities of faith. Judaism was an education for Christianity. It prepared the world for the Redeemer's coming. It drilled and moralized the religious youth of the human race. It broke up the fallow-ground of nature, and cleared a space in the weed-covered soil to receive the seed of the Kingdom. Its moral regimen deepened the conviction of sin, while it multiplied its overt acts. Its ceremonial impressed on sensuous natures the idea of the Divine holiness; and its sacrificial rites gave definiteness and vividness to men's conceptions of the necessity of atonement, failing indeed to remove, but awakening the need and sustaining the hope of its removal.[1]

¶ The Disposition by God of the religious inheritance which ultimately is intended for all men, involved a gradual training of mankind in order that they might be able to accept the inheritance by fulfilling the conditions: the Disposition is first in favour of one man, then of a nation, finally of all nations. The one man at first needed no schoolmaster: he was able to respond at once to the requirements of God. But the nation, when it came to exist, was not able in itself to rise to the conditions which God demanded. It needed education and the constant watching of a careful guardian: the Law was given to watch over the young nation as it was being trained and educated in the school of life: the Law was not itself the teacher, but the *paidagogos*. Then came the age of Christ, who opened, first to the Jews and through them to all nations, the door of Faith.[2]

[1] G. G. Findlay, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 225.

[2] W. M. Ramsay, *A Historical Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*, 384.

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NEHEMIAH.

I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down.—Neh. vi. 3.

THE author of the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah has quoted at length in the opening chapters of Nehemiah from the personal memoirs of the noble patriot through whose activity the walls of Jerusalem were restored. They are the best historical records in the Old Testament, and they shed clear, contemporary light upon this most important period in the evolution of Judaism. The narrative is straightforward and vivid. It lights up the otherwise dark period which precedes Nehemiah and enables the historian to bridge with assurance the century that intervened before the apocryphal book of 1 Maccabees throws its light upon the course of Israel's troubled history.

I.

1. Nehemiah plunges suddenly into his story, without giving us any hints of his previous history. His whole memoir is taken up with his leave of absence from "Shushan the palace" (Susa), and with what he did for Jerusalem during his furlough. By the time that his fragment of autobiography opens, the first return from the Captivity had taken place some time before. Jerusalem, in a way, had been largely rebuilt. The Temple also, after a fashion, had been restored, and the daily services were in full operation. But the walls and the gates and the towers and the battlements of the new Jerusalem still lay in ruins all round the city; and while that was the case, the whole city stood open to the inroads and the ravages of their enemies round about. Nor was that the worst. It was a weariness and a despair to read it—but the returned captives themselves were living in far greater poverty and bondage in Jerusalem than in all their seventy years in Babylon itself.

2. Nehemiah, then, one of the Jewish captives, had risen to the high position of cup-bearer to the Persian monarch, Artaxerxes. To him there came one day, while the Persian court was at its winter residence of Susa, his brother Hanani and certain other Jews, on a pilgrimage from Jerusalem. Nehemiah eagerly questioned them about the condition of the city and of the people who with Ezra had been struggling to rebuild the State. Their report was most depressing to the patriot: "The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach; the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire." When Nehemiah heard the bad news he "sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven." His prayer acknowledges the sins of the Jewish people, but calls upon God to fulfil His promise in view of the repentance of the people, and to "grant his servant mercy before this man," *i.e.*, the king.

3. This was in the month Chisleu, or November, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes. Five months later it was Nehemiah's turn to hand the king his wine, the queen Damaspia sitting by, and Artaxerxes noticed that he looked dejected and distressed. He asked accordingly what was the matter with him, and Nehemiah, after an inward prayer to God, told the reason, and asked permission to visit Jerusalem and rebuild its walls.

At heart the Persian courtier was a Jewish patriot. Patriotism is the most prominent principle in his conduct. Deeper considerations emerge later, especially after he has come under the influence of an enthusiastic religious teacher in the person of Ezra. But at first it is the city of his fathers that moves his heart. He was evidently a favourite with the king and had brilliant prospects, but the ruins of Zion were more attractive to him than the splendours of Shushan, and he willingly flung away his chances of a great career to take his share of "affliction and reproach." He has never had justice done him in popular estimation. He is not one of the well-known Biblical examples of heroic self-abandonment; but he did just what Moses did, and the eulogium of the Epistle to the Hebrews fits him as well as the lawgiver; for he too chose rather to suffer with the people of God than to

enjoy pleasures for a season. Nehemiah stands out in the history of Judaism as the first great layman who freely sacrificed himself in the cause of his religion and his country.

4. The permission was granted. There were probably reasons of State inclining Artaxerxes to favour Nehemiah's project. It would accord with the interests of Persia, which had suffered both in the Egyptian revolt and from the high-handed conduct of Megabyzos, satrap of Syria, to possess a fortress lying between the two disaffected districts. So Nehemiah was granted an escort for the journey, together with letters to the authorities of the Trans-Euphratic province. These gave him the right to take timber out of the king's forest for the wall, for "the castle which appertaineth to the house," and for the governor's own residence. The arduous journey of fifteen hundred miles over mountains and barren deserts was enough to daunt a man reared in the luxury of an Oriental court, but Nehemiah was inspired by an ideal of service which recognized no obstacles.

¶ "The more I advance in life," says De Tocqueville, "the more I see it in the light which I at one time attributed to the enthusiasm of youth; as a thing in itself of small account, valuable only so far as used in the fulfilment of duty, in the service of mankind, and in taking up one's place in their ranks. In the midst of my greatest troubles I find in these thoughts the spring which lifts up my heart." In a truly deep-thinking man there is thus the feeling that life is given for a higher end than the culture of the individual (the Goethe idea)—that it is a service. And if a service, then it cannot simply be for humanity in general, for the end that is not in the unit cannot be in the mass. It must be in God.[1]

II.

1. The arrival of Nehemiah at Jerusalem with his "firman," his loyal guard, and his retinue of slaves, was regarded as a great event both on the spot, and by the "watchful jealousy" of the surrounding tribes. He lived, we must suppose, in the fortress or palace of the governors overlooking the Temple area, and then, with a splendid magnanimity unusual in Eastern potentates, he declined the official salary and the ordinary official exactions, and

[1] John Ker, *Thoughts for Heart and Life*, 206.

kept open house for a hundred and fifty guests from year to year, with a profusion of choice dishes, on the delicacy of which even the munificent governor seems to dwell in his recollections with a complacent relish. But this and every other step which Nehemiah took was subordinated to the one design which possessed his mind.

2. Nehemiah spent three days in Jerusalem without daring to hint at his purpose, or even to arouse suspicions by being seen to examine the defences of the city. He tells us how he made a circuit of the city by night, riding on his mule round the ruined walls; how he found the ravine of the Kidron so entirely choked with masses of rubbish that there was no place for the beast that was under him to pass; how he followed the course of the torrent northwards, surveying the scene of desolation, and finally returned to the gate of the valley, whence he had started. Without delay he appealed to the patriotism of the inhabitants: "Ye see the evil case that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach." The answer to his appeal was immediate: "Let us rise up and build."

It is impossible to tell how extensive the damage to the walls was. The word used by Nehemiah in i. 3 and ii. 13 implies that there were only breaches to repair; but these were evidently of wide extent. Nehemiah's plans for the work bear witness to his sagacity, his skill in organization, and his dexterous management of men. He enlisted all members of the community both within and without Jerusalem. He organized them under their local leaders and set them to the task in which each was most interested. We read of five cases in which men were working at the breaches close by their own dwellings. Thus the heads of the different villages, the elders of the leading families, the guilds of workmen, and even the priests, were all put to work and were inspired by the spirit of natural rivalry as well as common loyalty. Nehemiah himself with his immediate followers directed the work, and instituted a strict military rule which secured both efficiency and protection.

¶ Nehemiah's Memoirs reveal a strong personality, full of piety towards God and his people, with a power both of sincere

prayer and the persuading of men. Without Isaiah's vision or Jeremiah's later patience, Nehemiah fulfils the prophetic ideal of the ruler, whose chief signs shall be that he draws breath in the fear of the Lord, that he defends the cause of the poor, that he has gifts of persuasion and inspiration, that he is quick to distinguish between the worthy and the evil, and that he does not spare the evil in their way. Nehemiah is everywhere dependent upon God, and conscious "of the good hand of his God upon him." He has the strong man's power of keeping things to himself, but when the right moment comes he can (unlike Ezra) persuade and lift the people to their work. He has a keen discernment of character and motive. He is intolerant of the indulgent, the compromising and the lazy, even when they are nobles—who, as he expresses it, "put not their necks to the work of the Lord." In the preparations for his mission and its first stages at Jerusalem he is thoroughly practical. In his account of his building he proves himself careful and true to detail. As he becomes familiar with the conditions on which he has been called to act, and gradually realizes how much he must do beyond the mere building of walls, the growth of his sense of the grandeur of his work is very beautiful.[1]

3. Some serious difficulties had to be met, however, before all the breaches could be closed. The opposition to Nehemiah's measures, which had been gradually increasing, assumed active shape. The centre of opposition was the same as before—the city of mixed population, Samaria. Its leader was a man with the Assyrian name of Sanballat, and he had attached to himself two others who represented old enemies of Israel—Tobiah the Ammonite and Geshem the Arabian, possibly of the stock of Edom, now settled in the South country. These three "adversaries" at first ridiculed the rising wall as mere "stones out of the heaps of rubbish," too feeble to resist the push of a night-wandering jackal; but when it had reached half its destined height their attitude changed. Then they gained over the Philistines of Ashdod on the West, so that four allied tribes formed a menacing circle round about Jerusalem. Trouble at the same time came upon Nehemiah from within. Scarcity of provisions and high prices caused the poor to remonstrate. They threatened that, if corn were not given them, they would break open the granaries and take it. Many had pledged their children

[1] G. A. Smith, *Jerusalem*, ii. 341.

for debt, and these were sold as slaves. The wealthier classes had taken advantage of the necessity of the poor. Nehemiah was justly angry, and promptly summoned the offenders before a public meeting. He reviewed his own generous course, and appealed to them to be liberal, restoring the mortgaged land, and remitting a part of the debt which the people were unable to pay. It is pleasant to know that his request was responded to cordially; and the people took an oath to execute their pledge.

Nehemiah himself was undaunted and untiring; he prayed to God, and appealed to patriotism; he also set well-armed sentinels who watched in relays to prevent desertion and to repel attack. Even when the immediate fear was over, he had every one of his workmen furnished with a sword, while he himself went the rounds attended by a trumpeter to call to arms in case of alarm. His instructions were that none should lodge outside the gates, and none go without his weapon to the water; neither he nor any one of his retinue put off his clothes at night. Such vigilance met with its reward. The allies dared not attack openly, but, baffled, they tried what deceit could do. Their various attempts to hinder the work, or to remove Nehemiah, are described by him in a manner that is almost amusing. They withdrew to the plain of Ono, nearly thirty miles distant from Jerusalem, and five times endeavoured to entice him to meet them there, alleging that a report was being spread that he had hired prophets to proclaim him king, and that it would be advisable for the Jewish governor to confer with his Samaritan colleague as to the best means of contradicting it. To each message Nehemiah returned the memorable answer: "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down; why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?"

On the fifth occasion, finding that his former messages were unheeded, Sanballat sent an open letter, the contents of which would necessarily be generally known, while Tobiah corresponded with "the nobles of Judah," with whom he was allied by marriage, and the prophetess Noadiah, like some of the other prophets, and a certain Shemaiah, were "hired" to put Nehemiah in fear. Shemaiah urged the governor to take refuge in the Temple, as his life was in danger. To have done this would have effectually injured Nehemiah's influence. He saw through the plot, and gave

a dignified reply—"Should such a man as I flee? and who is there, that, being such as I, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in."

Proof against treachery and fear, the stout-hearted ruler of the Jews persevered, until after fifty-two days of continuous effort Jerusalem stood safe within her new defences. That he succeeded in the face of all these obstacles in rebuilding the walls in this incredibly short period is explained only by his superlative skill, devotion, and energy.

¶ The completion of the circuit of the walls of Jerusalem testifies to the admirable organizing power of Nehemiah, his tact in putting the right men in the right places—the most important and difficult duty of a leader of men—and his perseverance in overcoming the obstacles and objections that must have been thrust in his path—all of them what people call secular qualities, yet all sustained and perfected by a noble zeal and by that transparent unselfishness which is the most powerful solvent of the selfishness of other people. There are more moral qualities involved in the art of organization than they would suppose who regard it as a hard, mechanical contrivance in which human beings are treated like parts of a machine. The highest form of organization is never attained in that brutal manner. Directly we approach men as persons endowed with rights, convictions, and feelings, an element of sympathy is called for which makes the organizing process a much more delicate concern.[1]

4. Apparently Nehemiah's original leave of absence was for but a short period. He accordingly placed his kinsman Hanani, who had headed the original deputation to Susa, and a certain Hananiah in charge of the city. To protect it against sudden attack its gates were closed at night and not opened until the middle of the following forenoon. Effective measures were also instituted to increase its population.

The completion of the walls was celebrated with a great dedication service. Walls and gates and people were purified, and two processions were formed to move around the circuit of the walls in opposite directions, Ezra at the head of one company, and Nehemiah of the other, until they met near the Temple, where the ceremonies of thanksgiving and dedication culminated in sacrifices and rejoicings. Appointments were also made for the proper

[1] W. F. Adeney, *Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther*, 214.

observance of the Temple rites. These things being completed, Jerusalem being once more a city without reproach, social and religious order being well established, and Nehemiah's leave of absence expiring, he returned to the court of Persia.

He had reorganized the Judæan community, rebuilt their walls, and inspired them with a new sense of self-respect; thus he made possible that genuine revival of the Judæan State which took place during the succeeding centuries. Like Ezekiel, Haggai, Zechariah, and the II Isaiah, Nehemiah was indeed one of the makers of Judaism. Ben Sira with true insight declared:

> "The memorial of Nehemiah is great,
> Who raised up for us the walls that were fallen,
> And set up the gates and bars,
> And raised up our homes again."

¶ If any young minister should be ordained, like Nehemiah, over such a congregation as Jerusalem was in that day; if he finds the gates thereof burned with fire, and the walls laid waste, and the whole house of God in reproach round about; let him read the Book of Nehemiah till he has it by heart. Let him view the wreck and ruin on his arrival as the young cup-bearer did. Let him say nothing to any man. Only let him rise up in the King's name and build. Let him come to the King's quarries for stone, and to the King's forests for timber. The good hand of his God being upon him, let him preach his very best to his long-starved people every Sabbath morning; and better and better every year he lives. Let him visit his long-neglected people night and day. Let him be like Samuel Rutherford in as small a church as was in Scotland in that day, and now and for ever as famous. Let him be his people's boast. Let him be always in his study, always at their sickbeds, always preaching, always praying.[1]

III.

1. During Nehemiah's absence at the Persian court, serious evils made their appearance in Jerusalem. Eliashib the high priest actually allied himself by marriage with the Ammonite Tobiah, and assigned him a lodging within the precincts of the Temple. Eliashib's own grandson married the daughter

[1] A. Whyte.

of Sanballat. Maintenance was not given to the Levites, who, in consequence, forsook the Temple to till their own fields. The Sabbath was being profaned by field-labour, and by hawkers of dried fish and other commodities from Tyre selling in Jerusalem. The evil of mixed marriages again appeared; certain Jews "married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab," and their children could not even speak in "the Jews' language."

It is highly probable that the report of these evils impelled Nehemiah's return. When he arrived he set about the necessary reforms with characteristic vigour. Tobiah's belongings were cast out of the Temple chamber, and it was restored to its sacred uses. The people were compelled to pay the tithe for the support of the Levites and other Temple officers. The city gates were ordered to be closed during the whole of the Sabbath; the vendors who then set up their stalls outside of the gates were threatened so that they were afraid to renew the offence. The men with foreign wives suffered disgrace and punishment, and the people were put under oath to discontinue this violation of the Law. The arch-offender, Eliashib's grandson, was banished from Jerusalem.

¶ If sometimes his loneliness made Nehemiah too suspicious of his opponents or of his own people, this was but the defect of his qualities or inevitable in the atmosphere of intrigue that he had to breathe. To be able to criticise the personal violence which he confesses, "his smiting of some" of those who had married foreign wives, and "his plucking of their hair," we would need to have stood by him through all his troubles. The surmise is reasonable that such extreme measures may have been best for the lax and self-indulgent among his contemporaries; with Orientals, treatment of this kind from a man whom they trust or fear oftener enhances respect than induces resentment. By the followers of Him who in that same desecrated city overturned the tables of the money-changers, and scourged with a scourge of cords, much may be forgiven to an anger which is not roused by selfish disappointments or the sense of weakness, but by sins against national ideals, and which means expense to him who displays it. Anger is often selfish, but may also be one of the purest and most costly forms of self-sacrifice. The disciples, who saw the exhaustion to which it put our Lord, said of Him, "the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up." Had we been present with this lonely governor,

aware of the poorness of the best of the material he had to work with, and conscious, as we are to-day, of the age-long issues of his action, we might be ready to accord to his passion the same character of devotion and self-sacrifice. Such an "Apologia pro Nehemiâ" is necessary in face of recent criticisms on his conduct, all the materials for which have been supplied by his own candour. One of not the least faults of a merely academic criticism is that it never appeals to Christian standards except when it would disparage the men of the Old Testament, who at least understood as we cannot the practical conditions and ethical issues of the situations on which God set them to act.[1]

2. With the prayer, "Remember me, O my God, for good," Nehemiah's record ceases, and he himself disappears, a man of singular honesty and directness of purpose, of high courage and simple piety. The value of his bits of autobiography lies chiefly in what he reveals of the workings of his own heart. He is a man very much like ourselves. He is obviously anxious that God shall be good to him. Quite humanly he sets down in his journal, after the account of any successful piece of work that he has done, the naïve prayer that God will reward him and punish his enemies. He is a man with very obvious failings alongside of his unusual devotion and ability. But the thing that strikes us most of all is his habit of constant prayer and of consulting God about every part of his business life. He lived in an age when religion was very formal. There were people specially trained to pray, whose peculiar privilege it was to go directly into the presence of God—the priests. But Nehemiah never waited for the priests. He offered his own prayers. He was a business man whose whole life was steeped in prayer.

Nehemiah rendered a great service to his people, and its effect was more enduring than that of Ezra. He had this great advantage over Ezra, that his powers were purely secular, and exactly defined. The title of Chief Judge was ambiguous; it might mean anything or nothing. The title of Pekhah was perfectly clear. As civil governor, Nehemiah could go about his work without stirring up the embers of controversy or invading the privileges of caste. He could appeal to public spirit without raising sectional animosities. And he had this further and very decided advantage

[1] G. A. Smith, *Jerusalem*, ii. 342.

over Ezra, that he was a man of the world, accustomed to deal with men; deeply pious, but no bigot; very much in earnest, but no pedant; one who understood the art of conciliation, who had the fine tact, the *savoir faire*, the sympathetic and persuasive power, from the want of which Ezra's difficulties had in no small measure arisen.

¶ Sometimes men of great strength of will and purpose possess also in a high degree the gift of tact; and when this is combined with soundness of judgment it usually leads to a success in life out of all proportion to their purely intellectual qualities. In nearly all administrative posts, in all the many fields of labour where the task of man is to govern, manage, or influence others, to adjust or harmonize antagonisms of race or interests or prejudices, to carry through difficult business without friction and by skilful co-operation, this combination of gifts is supremely valuable. It is much more valuable than brilliancy, eloquence, or originality. I remember the comment of a good judge of men on the administration of a great governor who was pre-eminently remarkable for this combination. "He always seemed to gain his point, yet he never appeared to be in antagonism with anyone." The steady pressure of a firm and consistent will was scarcely felt when it was accompanied by the ready recognition of everything that was good in the argument of another, and by a charm of manner and of temper which seldom failed to disarm opposition and win personal affection.[1]

3. But Nehemiah had done a greater thing than he dreamt of at the time, a greater thing than his rebuilding of the walls, when he brought his illustrious contemporary out of retirement and forced inaction, and lent him all the support of his official authority and personal popularity. The honour shown to Ezra in the proceedings of the dedication day was indeed significant. When Nehemiah first came to Judæa as its governor, he had taken up a neutral position, identifying himself with no party, and striving to reconcile all jealousies and antipathies in a common effort for the commonweal. In this he had only partially succeeded; and the obstacles thrown in his way by the priestly-patrician oligarchy, which had leagued itself with the foreign enemy, had naturally made a deep impression on his mind. This, together with Ezra's influence, had drawn him more and

[1] W. E. H. Lecky, *The Map of Life* (ed. 1901), 318.

more towards the Puritan party. The dedication day made final and public the breach between Nehemiah and the Zadokite faction. The high priest Eliashib and his partisans took no part in the ceremonial; and that place in the procession which of right belonged to the high priest was given to his rival the scribe. Henceforward Nehemiah was found among the Puritans, in fullest sympathy with their views, and lending them his powerful assistance in the attempt to work out their theory of reform.

4. The combined work of Ezra and Nehemiah constituted a movement which marked a turning-point of deep interest in Jewish history. It laid the foundation-stone of Judaism; it definitely transformed the nation into a congregation or church; it made the Law not merely the basis of civic and social life, but the common possession of each individual Israelite. It was the work of Ezra and Nehemiah to establish and organize a Church, on such principles as would guard Israel's distinctness from the heathen world and preserve its national unity. In the broad fact that the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah describe the reorganization of the Temple worship and the endeavour of the Jewish leaders to secure a more general faithfulness to the conditions of the Divine covenant, we are to discern the element which gives them a place in the Hagiographa. The instruments whom God raised up to carry His purpose to fulfilment were men who were themselves penetrated by the thought of the blessedness of covenant fellowship with God.

¶ Nehemiah perceived that God's mercy and His covenant go together, that the covenant does not dispense with the need of mercy any more than it forecloses the action of mercy. When the covenant people fall into sin, they cannot claim forgiveness as a right; nor can they ever demand deliverance from trouble on the ground of their pact with God. God does not bargain with His children. A Divine covenant is not a business arrangement, the terms of which can be interpreted like those of a deed of partnership, and put into force by the determinate will of either party. The covenant is, from the first, a gracious Divine promise and dispensation, conditioned by certain requirements to be observed on man's side. Its very existence is a fruit of God's mercy, not an outcome of man's haggling, and its operation is just through the continuance of that mercy. It is true a promise, a sort of pledge, goes with the covenant; but that is a promise of

mercy, a pledge of grace. It does not dispense with the mercy of God by converting what would otherwise be an act of pure grace on His part into a right which we possess and act upon of our own sole will. What it does is to afford a channel for the mercy of God, and to assure us of His mercy, which, however, remains mercy throughout.[1]

[1] W. F. Adeney, *Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther*, 178.

ESTHER.

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ESTHER.

For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall relief and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place, but thou and thy father's house shall perish: and who knoweth whether thou art not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?—Esth. iv. 14.

I.

The Book of Esther.

1. The Book of Esther is one of the writings of the Rabbinical Canon. In the Hellenistic Canon, it is placed after the Apocryphal pieces of fiction, Tobit and Judith, as if recognized to be of the same type. The style of Esther is dramatic and rapid in its development of incident. Scene after scene springs into place, until the climax of difficulty is reached, and the knot is tied so that it seems impossible to escape. Then it is untied with wondrous dexterity. All this is the art of the story-teller, and not the method of the historian. The things which interest the historian are not in the book. Esther is a didactic story, like Ruth and Jonah, Judith and Tobit, and raises more historical difficulties than can easily be removed. The monarch seems to be Xerxes, the voluptuous and absolute ruler of the Persian Empire. The story is one of court intrigue, in which Esther, the favourite wife, and her uncle, Mordecai, prevail over Haman, the prime minister.

The book is connected with the Purim festival, and is supposed to give the historical account of its origin. It was probably on this account that it was admitted into the Canon. The deliverance of the Jews from massacre was thought to be worthy of commemoration in a festival; but without an historical document, giving a clear account of its origin, it would have inevitably become an unmeaning celebration. It seems that the Book of Esther is still read in the synagogue at the annual feast. It is a

monument of the specifically Jewish spirit, as that spirit was gradually formed under the pressure of foreign rule in post-Exilic times. Doubtless it reflects the fierce passions awakened by the Maccabean struggle, and so far, in the vindictive spirit which characterizes it, the story serves the purpose of practically illustrating a leading defect of the Old Testament discipline.

¶ Let us honestly acknowledge that Old Testament saints exhibit not a little of the spirit of vengeance. It jars upon our better feelings in many a beautiful psalm, and it has made many ask the question whether such songs should be embraced in the portions of the psalter sung in the Christian Church. We shall not enter upon the thorny subject of the imprecatory psalms further than to say that it is only upon such enemies as exhibit downright wickedness that the psalmists ask God's vengeance, and that in every case the motive seems to spring from a sense of duty and desire for God's honour. These sacred odes are not the outcome of private passion, but the psalmist identifies himself with God, and believes that God's majesty and glory are bound up with the overwhelming of His foes. Yet when all these considerations have been taken into account, we have to admit that this fiery hatred towards enemies could find no place in a code of Christian ethics. In the words of Dr. Maclaren, "They express a stage of feeling far beneath the Christian, and the attempt to slur over the contrast is in danger of hiding the glory of midday, for fear of not doing justice to the beauty of morning twilight." It was impossible to live under the pedagogic training of the Law without receiving some of its harshness into one's blood; but it was the only possible way by which in those times God could train men to be heroes and saints. When we remember that in Christian England, only three centuries ago, leaders of religion in this country—men of undoubted zeal for God, as they conceived of Him and His Kingdom—could burn their fellow-Christians at the stake, or drown them in the rushing flood, or torture them with thumbscrews for the good of their souls—when we remember these things, and see how the accepted standards of those times are now rejected by the present century, we may get help in understanding at how low a stage God had to commence the moral education of a people like Israel.[1]

2. Surprise has commonly been expressed at the reticence of the Book of Esther. No allusion is made to the hand of God guiding the complication of interests and aims to an issue favour-

[1] W. S. Bruce, *The Ethics of the Old Testament*, 285, 281.

able to the Jews. Patriotism is indeed more evident than religion in this book. To turn to it after the fervours of prophets and the continual recognition of God in history which marks the other historical books, is, as Ewald says, like coming down from heaven to earth. But that difference in tone probably represents accurately the difference between the saints and heroes of an earlier age and the Jews in Persia, in whom national feeling was stronger than devotion. The picture of their characteristics deducible from this book shows many of the traits which have marked them ever since—accommodating flexibility, strangely united with unbending tenacity; a capacity for securing the favour of influential people, and willingness to stretch conscience in securing it; reticence and diplomacy; and, beneath all, unquenchable devotion to Israel, which burns alike in the politic Mordecai and in the lovely Esther.

If patriotism is a virtue, and belongs to good morals in the Jewish and Christian systems, then the book has its place in the Bible, as teaching this virtue, even if everything else be absent. No book is so patriotic as the Book of Esther. Esther is the heroine of patriotic devotion. She is the incarnation of Jewish nationality, and thus is the appropriate theme of the great national festival of the Jews. And in all the Christian centuries Esther has been an inspiration to heroic women and an incentive to deeds of daring for heroic men.

¶ There is no harm, there is much good, in patriotism taken by itself. The love of one's country is next to the love of one's home, and there is never any harm in true love wherever it makes its habitation. There is nothing but good where this love finds expression in labouring for one's country, in seeking the best things for it, in striving to lift it to its highest, in suffering for it with heroism and quenchless hope when its hour is darkest. But there are forms of patriotism which are survivals, with, happily, nothing but decay before them. That is the patriotism which, of old, taught the Greeks to call all outsiders barbarians, to whom no justice need be observed, no mercy shown. It is the patriotism which to-day exhibits itself in hatred and contempt of the foreigner; which calls for armaments to overawe or crush him; which refuses to acknowledge any excellence, any wisdom which is not insular; which would raise the wall of hostile tariffs as high as the wall of its own prejudice; a patriotism born of hatred rather than of love. But that, we say again, is a survival that

will not live. It is contrary to the spiritual consciousness, to the laws of the soul. The patriotism that will survive is the patriotism that, beginning in love, will go on in love; that will raise its own country that thereby it may the better help other countries; that will seek its own best, that it may thereby procure the best for every creature.[1]

3. But though the inclusion of the Book of Esther in the Canon was perhaps designed for instruction rather than spiritual edification, it is by no means altogether wanting in religious characteristics. The LXX translation seems to bring out more clearly than the Hebrew the belief of the writer in God's providential guidance; and other lessons may be derived from it: the "deep sense of personal vocation to do God's work, faith in self-sacrificing intercession," courage, patriotism, and a steadfast adherence to the true faith even amid heathen surroundings.

The authorship and date of the book are wholly unknown. Its scene is laid in the Persian empire, and its theme is God's care for those of His people who did not return from captivity, but were dispersed over the vast dominions of Xerxes, or Ahasuerus the Mighty, as he is called in the book.

II.

Esther the Queen.

1. Ahasuerus was King of Persia, and he made a great feast in order to show his riches to the nobles and princes of provinces, and his queen, Vashti, made a feast for the women. When the feast had lasted a week, and the king was drunken with wine, he gave orders that the queen should be brought before him that his guests might admire her beauty. Vashti refused to submit to such indignity. This made the king angry, and eventually, lest her audacity should be followed by other women, the king deposed her, as an example. Then the fair young virgins of the land were gathered together to Shushan the palace, that Ahasuerus might, in despotic Oriental fashion, choose one of them as his queen instead of Vashti. The king chose Esther (or Hadassah, as she

[1] J. Brierley, *Religion and To-Day*, 285.

was called by her Hebrew countrymen). She obtained grace and favour in his sight. He placed the royal crown upon her head, and she dwelt in royal state.

2. And yet Esther was a Jewess—a woman of a conquered race, whose people were of the Captivity, and therefore despised and hated. This the king did not know, for Esther had not disclosed the fact that she was a Jewess, because Mordecai had charged her not to show her kindred or her people, and she obeyed him as she did when she lived in his house, and was as a daughter to him. For the beauty of Esther's character is this, that she was not spoiled by her great elevation. To be the one favourite out of all the select maidens of the kingdom, and to know that she owed her privileged position solely to the king's fancy for her personal charms, might have spoilt the grace of a simple Jewess. Haman was ruined by his honours becoming too great for his self-control. But in Esther we do not light on a trace of the silly vanity that became the most marked characteristic of the grand vizier. It speaks well for Mordecai's sound training of the orphan girl that his ward proved to be of stable character where a weaker person would have been dizzy with selfish elation.

There was a freedom enjoyed by the women of Israel that was not allowed in the more elaborate civilization of the great empires of the East, and this developed an independent spirit and a vigour not usually seen in Oriental women. In the case of Esther these good qualities were able to survive the external restraints and the internal relaxing atmosphere of her court life. The orphan girl who had grown up into beauty under the care of her uncle Mordecai, and was lifted suddenly from sheltered obscurity into the "fierce light that beats upon a throne," like some flower culled in a shady nook and set in a king's bosom, was true to her childhood's protector and to her people, and kept her sweet, brave gentleness unspoiled by the rapid elevation which ruins so many characters. Her Jewish name of Hadassah ("myrtle") well befits her, for she is clothed with unostentatious beauty, pure and fragrant as the blossoms that brides twine in their hair. But, withal, she has a true woman's courage which is always ready to endure any evil and dare any danger at the bidding of her heart.

¶ Esther is a heroine—capable, energetic, brave, and patriotic. The splendour of her career is seen in this very fact, that she does not succumb to the luxury of her surroundings. The royal harem among the lily-beds of Shushan is like a palace in the land of the lotus-eaters, "where it is always afternoon"; and its inmates, in their dreamy indolence, are tempted to forget all obligations and interests beyond the obligation to please the king and their own interest in securing every comfort wealth can lavish on them. We do not look for a Boadicea in such a hot-house of narcotics. And when we find there a strong unselfish woman such as Esther, conquering almost insuperable temptations to a life of ease, and choosing a course of terrible danger to herself for the sake of her oppressed people, we can echo the admiration of the Jews for their national heroine.[1]

III.

Esther's Opportunity.

1. Four years had passed since the deposition of Vashti; and after the rejoicings over the marriage and the remission of tribute, and the sending of presents to all parts of the empire in honour of Esther, five more years pass away with only the record of one episode—Mordecai's unveiling of a plot formed by two of the chamberlains to assassinate the king. We are, therefore, carried to the ninth year after the opening of the story, when Esther would probably be twenty-four or twenty-five years of age. In that year the favourite minister of Ahasuerus, named Haman, conceived a murderous design against all the Jews, because one of them, Mordecai, had refused to do obeisance to him.

2. Those Jews whom we find in Persia were some who refused to return to Palestine when Cyrus gave permission for the nation to go back from captivity. Many of the people did go, under the leadership of Zerubbabel. Living cut off by distance and associations from their kindred, with everything about them operating to rid their minds of national sympathy in watching for the hope of Israel, and of reverence for the God of their fathers, it is no wonder that the selfish and unworthy motives which first led them to remain in Persia should so increase upon them as to drift

[1] W. F. Adeney, *Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther*, 383.

them into a life of irreligion and open sin. Their national polity and worship were such as could exist and thrive only under conditions of the unity of the whole people, unity not only of heart and sympathy, but of life and action; and any attempt at the practice of even the outward forms of that worship would be a difficulty to Jews, related by abode and habit to a foreign people; and the setting upon them of a visible brand of alienation would expose them to hatred and persecution. No doubt the elements of the eruption had been combining, and the fire had been smouldering long before the shock came. The cause being in the people themselves and their peculiarities,—peculiarities which no failure in religious ardour could obliterate,—the occasion might come about through the merest trifle. It came through the jealousy and pride of the king's favourite, Haman. He easily persuaded his master to issue a proclamation condemning the Jews to be extirpated. "If it please the king, let it be written that they be destroyed." The king replied, "Do with them as it seemeth good to thee." It was speedily arranged, then, that on a certain day the Jews, men, women, and children, young and old, should be slain. This was an age of tragic necessity for God's people.

Mordecai contemplated this bitter necessity. He gazed upon it till his eyes were a fountain of tears. He studied the situation till the iron entered into his very soul. Then he made his appeal to Queen Esther to stand forward as the saviour of her people. He laid upon her the charge "that she should go in unto the king, to make supplication unto him, and to make request before him, for her people."

3. Esther is now at the well of testing. We must not be too hard upon her if we discover that the first things she thought about were the difficulties in the way. We are behind the scenes; we know the issue; but that was not Esther's position. To carry out a charge like this meant real danger for her, and in the end she might fail to accomplish her purpose.

It was the law of the palace that, on pain of death, no woman, not even his wife, should approach the king unbidden. It was true that those were excepted from this penalty to whom the king, at their approach, held out the golden sceptre; but events

had recently happened which rendered it extremely unlikely that the king would be disposed to overlook anything which might appear an infringement of his rights. The king had evidently got tired of Esther, having probably found another favourite; for Esther had not been called into the royal presence for thirty days. And so she wished Mordecai to understand the situation and the difficulties in her way. That was the purport of her reply—not a refusal, but a wise estimate of the opposing forces.

To this Mordecai replied by repeating his entreaty; and, rising to a strain of truly prophetic earnestness, he added the words: "If thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall relief and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place, but thou and thy father's house shall perish: and who knoweth whether thou art not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

It was a sublime appeal, and it was effectual. The fair young heroine's soul rose to the occasion, and responded with a swift determination to her uncle's lofty words. Esther returned answer to Mordecai to gather all the Jews in the city to fast and pray for the success of her adventure. "I also," she added, "and my maidens will fast in like manner; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish."

4. Her pathetic request for the prayers of the people for whose sake she was facing death was surely more than superstition. Little as she says about her faith in God, it obviously underlay her courage. When Esther nerved herself to enter the presence of Ahasuerus at the risk of her life—"I will go in unto the king; and if I perish, I perish"—she expressed, although she never named the name of God, a religious devotion as acceptable to Him as that of Moses and David, who no less sincerely had the sacred name always on their lips. She was relying not on her beauty and grace, but, on the contrary, on her fastings and prayers; and these not of herself alone, but of her attendants, and especially of "all the Jews present in Shushan," that she might go before the king, not in her own strength, but in that of God.

5. This call to save her people saved Esther; for it smote down and annihilated in her the instincts of selfish pleasure and brought

up to the surface all the noble elements of her character; and the consequence was that, instead of living and dying as the puppet of an Oriental despot, she now survives through all the centuries as one of those figures from whom noble deeds draw their inspiration. We cannot but admire her spirit of courage and patriotism. She was asked to go in and plead with the king for those millions of her kinspeople. She was asked to go in and tell him what he did not yet know, that she herself was one of the despised and hated race. She was asked to brave his possible anger, his almost certain displeasure, to incur the risk of disgrace, and, not improbably, of a sharp and cruel death. No one else could do it. On her decision hung the fate of these two millions. It was but a forlorn hope; the chances were that she would fail and fall with the rest of them. But no matter! There are things dearer than life. She would rather venture all and, failing, die, than leave those people to perish and live on. "So will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish." This is the true note of heroism.

¶ Personality, a self-determining whole, as it has been somewhere defined, stands as it were apart or aloof, and making its choice determines of what character it will be, and in the surrender to Truth realizes the idea of its being. True decision, true self-determination, will be the right corrective for all false ideas of emancipation, falsely fancied freedom from conventions. Real freedom, as is well known, does not consist in doing as we like in imagined independence, but it is freedom to live according to the right law of being, to make actual the ideal self.[1]

Grant us the will to fashion as we feel,
Grant us the strength to labour as we know,
Grant us the purpose, ribbed and edged with steel,
To strike the blow.

Knowledge we ask not—knowledge Thou hast lent,
But, Lord, the will—there lies our bitter need,
Give us to build above the deep intent
The deed, the deed.[2]

[1] R. M. Wills, *Personality and Womanhood*, 93.
[2] J. Drinkwater, *Poems of Men and Hours*, 2.

IV.

Esther the Saviour of her People.

1. Having once accepted her dreadful task, Esther proceeds to carry it out with courage. The hour is come. For many days the king and his courtiers have been feasting in Shushan. The halls are filled with incense and music; the doors are defended by stolid Nubian guards. Who comes yonder along the marble walk? They start in amazement and whisper to one another. It is the queen! For a woman to intrude upon the king's revels at such a time is to incur a double certainty of death. She draws near, arrayed in her royal apparel—a vision of beauty. They stand aside, overawed, to let her pass. Young, fair, resplendent with royal garments, she stands silent where the king may see her as he sits high on his lofty throne. His eye lights upon her, and as he beholds her face, he holds out the golden sceptre. "So Esther drew near, and touched the top of the sceptre." Her beauty, her calm demeanour, her magnificent courage, have vanquished him. "What wilt thou, queen Esther? and what is thy request? it shall be given thee, even to the half of the kingdom." The sceptre is stretched out; the crisis is past; Israel is saved!

2. But if Esther's courage is sublime, her discretion and forethought are equal to it. Her plans are formed with the utmost deliberation. She has to assail an all-powerful minister and to reverse a royal decree. The time is short, and yet to be precipitate will ruin all. The golden sceptre was held out, and she was at liberty to state her request; for the king assumed that she would not have taken this unconventional step unless she had a request to make.

What a supernatural restraint and wisdom were implied in the request she made! She never mentioned her grievance. She kept the thought of her imperilled people concealed. With simple grace she asked for the honour of entertaining the king and his great minister at a banquet. This, though it evidently implied something more, was gladly granted, and at the banquet the king graciously asked again what she desired. Surely some inner

monitor warned her to delay, assured her that during the night invisible spirits would co-operate with her design, and led her to make a request that her husband and the great man would honour her by coming to her banquet again on the following day. Haman was lulled into unsuspicion, and his head was turned by the distinction of drinking with the king and queen alone. He went forth flushed with pride, full of joyfulness, lifting his head on high; but, lo! as he went through the king's gate there sat Mordecai, the Jew, who, loyal to the implacable traditions of his race, "stood not up nor moved for him." Haman went home insane with fury, and at the instigation of his wife, prepared a gallows fifty cubits high on which to hang the insolent Mordecai.

3. It is just at this very time that an event occurs which is apparently quite unconnected with the story, but which, we are forced to conclude, was no accident, but a response of God to the prayer and to the need of His people—the sleepless night of the king, the reading of the chronicle of a bygone year, and the discovery that the servant who saved the king's life has been unrewarded. Next morning Haman has audience of the king on business of State. He is asked to say what should be done to some one "whom the king delighteth to honour." The vain man is so certain of the royal favour as to believe that he himself is the person to be so honoured. And he suggests a certain public procession next day through the streets of the capital, when almost royal honour should openly be paid to the unknown man. His advice is taken. The man in question turns out to be Mordecai, the Jew; and Haman is to attend, and to walk beside the horse, while the proclamation is made, "Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour." This is done. The hand of God is in it. The first step has been taken to save the people of Israel, and deliver them from their fate.

The queen's banquet is ready, and Haman is summoned to attend. He is not long kept in suspense. Esther's petition is presented. She asks for her life and the life of her people, doomed to die by the malice of an enemy. "Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?" The king is all on the alert. Esther says it is Haman, and the monarch is furious. Haman's appeal to Esther is the signal

for his removal. What is to be done with him? The tree prepared for Mordecai occurs to one of the attendants. Just what was wanted. "Hang him thereon." Haman had already given Mordecai what he had chosen for himself, and now what he had chosen for Mordecai is given to him.

But the wonderful interposition of God was not yet finished; the Jews were still in danger. The decree of death had gone forth, and unless the king's heart could be touched and turned, they would fall by the sword. What was to be done? Queen Esther fell down at his feet, wept tears of grief and love, and besought him to reverse his decree. It was done! This great, beautiful, royal woman prevailed with her master and lord, and swift messengers went forth at once to all the provinces, giving permission to all the Jews to stand for their lives. This was done through Mordecai, the Jew, who had been promoted to high honour, and entrusted with the king's ring for that purpose; and hence we read in the fifteenth verse of the eighth chapter that "Mordecai went forth from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue and white, and with a great crown of gold, and with a robe of fine linen and purple." And "the Jews had light and gladness, and joy and honour."

4. Up to this point our author has, with considerable skill, presented a brave and noble character in his delineation of Esther. But here his patriotism overmasters him. Remembering that his object is to glorify not the woman but his people, and to furnish an adequate theme for the exultations of the feast of Purim, he allows his own fiery vindictiveness to run away with him, not noticing that by connecting the heroine with deeds of wild and useless slaughter he is marring the character which he has successfully drawn.

It is painful to see how the woman who had saved her people at the risk of her own life pushed her advantage to the extremity of a bloodthirsty vengeance. She pleaded for an extra day of slaughter, and begged that the ten sons of Haman who were dead should be publicly impaled on the stake. And the feast of Purim, instituted to commemorate God's mercy, became also a memorial and a glorification of this senseless deed of vengeance.

It is all very well to say that, as the laws of the Medes and

Persians could not be altered, there was no alternative but a defensive slaughter. We may try to shelter Esther under the customs of the times; we may call to mind the fact that she was acting on the advice of Mordecai, whom she had been taught to obey from childhood, so that his was by far the greater weight of responsibility. Still, as we gaze on the portrait of the strong, brave, unselfish Jewess, we must confess that beneath all the beauty and nobility of its expression certain hard lines betray the fact that Esther is not a Madonna, that the heroine of the Jews does not reach the Christian ideal of womanhood.

5. We could have wished that the book which bears the name of Esther had not been marred by this gleam of fanaticism; but as we have been desirous to praise and to imitate the noble Jewess, we are, for the vindication of our Christian morality, compelled to repudiate expressly and vehemently the passion of the vengeful Jews. And if we complain of Luther for wishing to cut the book out of the Canon, on the ground that the character of the woman gives us a fine example of inspired portraiture, it is only just to the great reformer and moralist to admit that it would be far better to part with the book than to allow ourselves, even for a moment, to justify the events which were celebrated in the feast of Purim. The eternal laws of God forbid that goodness can ever be produced by revolting tales of vengeance. If the Jews had been represented as being able to forgive, the book would have been less historical but more edifying. And we can cling to our beautiful Esther only on condition that we may entirely separate her from the pitiless zeal of Mordecai, and the aspersions of the author who created her character.

¶ If—as seems probable—our Lord honoured the Feast of Purim by taking part in it (John v. 1), He must have credited the national life of His people with a worthy mission. Himself the purest and best fruit of the stock of Israel, on the human side of His being, He realized in His own great mission of redemption the end for which God had repeatedly redeemed Israel. Thus He showed that God had saved His people, not simply for their own selfish satisfaction, but that through Christ they might carry salvation to the world. Purged from its base associations of blood and cruelty, Purim may symbolize to us the triumph of the Church of Christ over her fiercest foes. The spirit of this

triumph must be the very opposite of the spirit of wild vengeance exhibited by Mordecai and his people in their brief season of unwonted elation. The Israel of God can never conquer her enemies by force. The victory of the Church must be the victory of brotherly love, because brotherly love is the note of the true Church. But this victory Christ is winning throughout the ages, and the historical realization of it is to us the Christian counterpart of the story of Esther.[1]

6. But we must not look only at the visible persons and forces. This Book of Esther does not say much about God, but His presence broods over it all, and is the real spring that moves the movers that are seen. It is all a lesson of how God works out His purposes through men who seem to themselves to be working out theirs. The king's criminal abandonment to lust and luxury, Haman's meanly personal pique, Esther's beauty, the fall of the favourite, the long past services of Mordecai, even the king's sleepless night, are all threads in the web, and God is the weaver. The story raises the whole question of the standing miracle of the co-existence and co-operation of the Divine and the human. Man is free and responsible; God is sovereign and all-pervading. He maketh the wrath of man to praise Him, and with the remainder thereof He girdeth Himself. To-day, as then, He is working out His deep designs through men whom He has raised up, though they have not known Him. Amid the clash of contending interests and worldly passions, His solemn purpose steadily advances to its end, like the irresistible ocean current, which persists through all storms that agitate the surface, and draws them into the drift of its silent trend. Ahasuerus, Haman, Esther, Mordecai are His instruments, and yet each of them is the doer of his or her deed, and has to answer to Him for it.

¶ I find some of my friends greatly agitated in mind about Responsibility, Free-will, and the like. I settled all those matters for myself, before I was ten years old, by jumping up and down an awkward turn of four steps in my nursery-stairs, and considering whether it was likely that God knew whether I should jump only three, or the whole four at a time. Having settled it in my mind that He knew quite well, though I didn't, which I should do; and also whether I should fall or not in the course of the performance—though I was altogether responsible

[1] W. F. Adeney, *Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther*, 403.

for taking care not to—I never troubled my head more on the matter, from that day to this.[1]

¶ To his friend R. B. Litchfield, Clerk Maxwell writes from Aberdeen:—"In one phase, human actions are the resultant (by parallelogram of forces) of the various attractions of surrounding things, modified in some degree by internal states, regarding which all that is to be said is that they are subjectively capricious, objectively the 'Result of Law'—that is, the wilfulness of our wills feels to us like liberty, being in reality necessity. In another phase, the wilfulness is seen to be anything but free will, since it is merely a submission to the strongest attraction, after the fashion of material things. So some say that a man's will is the root of all evil in him, and that he should mortify it out till nothing of himself remains, and the man and his selfishness disappear together. So said Gotama Buddha (see Max Müller), and many Christians have said and thought nearly the same thing. Nevertheless there is another phase still, in which there appears a possibility of the exact contrary to the first state, namely, an abandonment of wilfulness without extinction of will, but rather by means of a great development of will, whereby, instead of being consciously free and really in subjection to unknown laws, it becomes consciously acting by law, and really free from the interference of unrecognized laws."[2]

¶ I asked whether the existence of persons *able* to introduce moral disorder into themselves was a fact that demonstrably contradicted the idea of a divinely ordered universe, which I had accepted as the necessary postulate of human experience. Was it not possible that a universe totally empty of free agents—and therefore of their moral as well as immoral acts, and thus of their disturbing abnormal influence—might be a *less* divine universe than the mixed universe in which we find ourselves; which contains persons *able* to do what they ought not to do, and who can introduce suffering as the natural consequence of their sin? If "freedom" to become what one ought not to be is implied in an individual personality, and in responsible agency; and if a universe that contains moral agents is more worthy of existence than a wholly non-moral one—the temporary existence of sinners and sufferers on our planet, or elsewhere, would even be a consequence of the divinity of the Whole. Omnipotence itself cannot overcome the visible contradiction that is involved in persons being at once free agents and not free agents. Moral agents *must* be able to originate the acts for which they are

[1] Ruskin, *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 37 (*Works*, xxviii. 14).

[2] *Life of James Clerk Maxwell*, 306.

responsible, notwithstanding the risks implied in this freedom of *their* acts from divine natural law;—unless it can be demonstrated that the universe in which such risk is run *must* be an *undivine* universe, simply because it contains *moral agents upon trial.* The presence in it of persons who may become what they ought not is otherwise no disproof of theistic optimism. It does not demonstrate that the theistic presupposition, on which life and experience depend, must be untrustworthy. A universe which has room for the probation and education of independent agents may be a better universe than one that consists only of impersonal things —one containing no agents on trial, or in progressive education of character, through the mixture of joy and sorrow that is found in human experience.[1]

[1] A. Campbell Fraser, *Biographia Philosophica*, 311.

JOB.

I.

The Problem.

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The Problem of Job.

Why hast thou set me as a mark for thee, so that I am a burden to myself?—Job vii. 20.

The Book of Job is a work not simply of literary but of living interest, a wonder even in that most wonderful body of ancient literature, so deeply studied, so little known, our Hebrew Scriptures. It appeals in an equal degree to the imagination and to the reason—to the one as philosophy, the grandest product of the Hebrew wisdom; to the other as poetry, the highest achievement in this field of the Hebrew or rather of the Semitic spirit, the ripe and fragrant fruit not so much of a man's or a people's genius as of the genius of a race. It stands there the work of a nameless man; no one can tell who he was, or where and when and how he lived; yet he so lived as to be one of our mightiest immortals, leaving all that made him what he was, the questions that vexed him, the thoughts that possessed him, the faith that consoled him, the hopes that transmuted and glorified his sorrows, set here as to everlasting music. That is an immortality which modesty itself need not blush to own: the man nameless, but his speech and his spirit alive and articulate for evermore.[1]

The name of Job, with some portion of the story recorded in the book that bears his name, has been a household possession of mankind for centuries. Proverb after proverb has grown out of that story. It is not in our own tongue only that the "patience of Job," the "poverty of Job," the "comforters of Job," have become familiar phrases. The image of the patriarch seated amidst his ashes, with a saintly glory round his head, has adorned alike the walls of cottages and the storied windows of stately churches. Passages of matchless beauty, or pathos, or majesty, have passed into the poetry of many languages. Words from our

[1] A. M. Fairbairn.

own older version breathe the hope and comfort which Christians welcome as they follow their departed dear ones to their graves. Yet in spite of this, it is not too much to say that the real contents, the essential teaching, of the book appear to have been almost or quite lost for ages. Its fate has resembled that of some ancient picture, a portion of which still stands out bright and clear; the rest has been overlaid by layer after layer of the accumulation of generations, yet with the colours and original design still preserved, untouched and secure for the first age that should be content to seek for and recover them.[1]

1. The problem of suffering is the great *enigma vitæ*, the solution of which, for ever attempted, may for ever baffle the human mind. Why our planet has been invaded by physical and moral evil; why a God of infinite love and power has ordained or permitted the sufferings of sentient beings; why His "whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now"; why, in particular, the operation of pain is apparently so indiscriminate that the innocent suffer with the guilty—these questions are asked in bewilderment to-day, and the facts which evoke them have troubled the spirit of man ever since it began to grope for meaning and purpose in life. This is the sphinx-riddle of existence; this is the crux of theism. Every age endeavours to throw some fresh glimmer of light on the perennial problem, which ordinarily presents itself to the plain man not as an intellectual puzzle, but as a heart-piercing sorrow or a haunting fear.

The problem concerns the relation in which the great fact of suffering in the world, and especially in the life of good men, stands to the government of the world by an omnipotent and all-wise God, and to a moral order, conceived to exist therein. It has to be carefully noted that here we have no merely speculative or metaphysical discussion on what has been correctly called "the vain and interminable controversy as to the origin of evil in the world." Nothing is so fruitless as an inquiry into the matter of origins. We have to deal with the great facts of life, as the experience of things shows them to be. We have to deal with what is, and try to understand it, not concerning ourselves with

[1] Dean Bradley.

what might have been, or contemplating the possibility of a world altogether different from our own. In the work before us, the writer deals with what is real, and with what is human. The great facts of life are looked at most earnestly, and in their acutest and most pressing form, and an effort is made, if not to state or set forth a full and complete theory to meet the facts, at least to seek for some better and more adequate explanation of these facts than had as yet been reached.

¶ Our own age, which brings to the solution of old problems the new light of evolution—the struggle for life, the survival of the fittest, the solidarity of human existence with that of the creation at large—is profoundly conscious of the anomalies of the world regarded as a moral order. Increasing culture has increased its capacity for pain—its sensitiveness, its sympathy, its perplexity in the presence of the mystery of evil. It is an age in which the thoughts of many hearts are revealed, and its spirit is frankly critical of the constitution under which we are obliged to live. Logic states its clear, simple, and apparently irrefragable case: "If the maker of the world *can* all that he will, he wills misery, and there is no escape from the conclusion." Philosophy regards it as a "depressing and revolting belief that the destinies of the universe are at the mercy of a being who, with the resources of omnipotence at his disposal, decided to make a universe no better than this." Science asks "why among the endless possibilities open to omnipotence—that of sinless happy existence among the rest—the actuality in which sin and misery abound should be selected." Poetry is constrained to ask:

> Wherefore should any evil hap to man—
> From ache of flesh to agony of soul—
> Since God's All-mercy mates All-potency?
> Nay, why permits He evil to Himself—
> Man's sin, accounted such? Suppose a world
> Purged of all pain, with fit inhabitant—
> Man pure of evil in thought, word, and deed—
> Were it not well? Then, wherefore otherwise?[1]

2. But the problem of the Book of Job is not concerned with the question of suffering only; it is concerned even more with that of injustice; Job's complaint is not so much that he is suffering as that he is suffering unjustly. He has lived a righteous life, but he is being treated by God as if he were unrighteous; his friends too

[1] J. Strahan, *The Book of Job Interpreted*, 1.

are regarding him as a sinner; and he is sure that he is not; they are insisting that he ought to go to confession, and he is conscious of no sins that he ought to confess.

In early Israel attempts were made to account for the seeming contradiction between God's government of the world and the actual facts of life; thus the Psalmist says:

"For evil-doers shall be cut off:
But those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the land.
For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be:
Yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and he shall not be.
But the meek shall inherit the land;
And shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace."
(Ps. xxxvii. 9–11.)

But it was seen that evil-doers were often *not* cut off, while those that waited upon the Lord by no means always inherited the land. Nevertheless, so strong was the conviction that all suffering and calamity *must* be the result of sin, that when the godly were seen to be in adversity or in sickness it was maintained that, righteous as they were *now*, they must, in time past, have committed some sin; and because the sin had been forgotten, and not atoned for, therefore its inevitable result was at last showing itself.

Job maintains that this visible system is irregular and unjust. Standing up for facts, and demanding their recognition whatever difficulties may ensue, he asserts this to be the fact—seen with his own eyes, in the whole state of the world around him, and brought specially home to him by his own adversity. He adheres resolutely to it, and will not allow truth to be tampered with and disguised. To this are owing all those justifications of himself, and assertions of his own righteousness, in which the book abounds, in answer to his friends, who try to persuade him that his calamities are judgments upon his sins. He makes these assertions, not on his own account simply, though firmly conscious of their truth, but for the sake of that argument which those assertions were the necessary medium of maintaining. Had he yielded to the persuasions of his friends, and confessed himself an offender, he would have allowed the conclusion they wanted; for his friends had simply inferred his guilt from his suffering, on the notion of the justice of this visible system. He therefore asserted

his own righteousness; and from that fact, combined with that of his affliction, drew the very opposite conclusion to the favourite one which they maintained.

Such is the process by which the Book of Job opens at length upon that great question which has grieved, perplexed, and embittered men from the beginning of the world. We find ourselves upon popular ground, and listening to an old familiar line of thought. The sentiment against the course of things here is no strange one to human minds: it is, in fact, so popular, that it may be called hackneyed. It is one that has vented itself largely in poetry, in proverbs, in philosophy, in satire; and, in connexion with this book of Scripture, it demands some consideration.

¶ So the book is a *theodicy*. The word "theodicy" comes from two Greek words which mean "to *justify God*," and the design of every theodicy is admirably expressed in words which are engraven on the pedestal of the statue of Milton in front of St. Giles's Church, Cripplegate:

> (to) assert Eternal Providence
> And justify the ways of God to men.[1]

¶ Job was assailed by no fiercer doubts than may come to us. At any time we may be overtaken by the most terrible calamity. And if not, unless we be very thoughtless, our spirits will sometimes be weighed down by an oppressive sense of the mystery of existence. The waste and cruelty so apparent throughout nature; the deadly regularity of law, going on its relentless course, in spite of the entreaties and groans of the myriads whom it tortures and prematurely slays; the necessity of believing, if we are to believe at all, not only without seeing, but even in opposition to what we seem to see; the consciousness that we have sought for God and found Him not, so that there is nothing for it but to say with Job, "Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: on the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him";—such feelings as these may at times weigh upon our spirits like a nightmare, and lead us to exclaim with the poet:

> Who shall read us the riddle of life?
> The continual sequence of pain,
> The perpetual triumph of wrong,
> The whole creation in travail to make
> A victory for the strong?

[1] J. T. Marshall, *Job and his Comforters*, 36.

How are we fettered and caged,
  Within our dark prison-house here!
We are made to look for a loving plan;
  We find everywhere sorrow and fear.
We look for the triumph of Good;
  And from all the wide world around,
The lives that are spent cry upward to heaven
  From the slaughter-house of the ground,
Till we feel that Evil is Lord.

And yet we are bound to believe,—
  Because all our nature is so,—
In a Ruler touched by an infinite ruth
  For all His creatures below.
Bound, though a mocking fiend point
  To the waste and ruin and pain;
Bound, though our souls should be bowed in despair;
  Bound, though wrong triumph again and again,
And we cannot answer a word.[1]

I.

The Problem beyond and before Job.

1. It is the Hebrew religion that sets the problem of the Book of Job. In the Greek tragedy of *Prometheus Bound*, Prometheus evokes our sympathy by sufferings so intense that only a superhuman being can endure them, which are to continue for long ages, where all hope of rest in death is excluded, because the sufferer is immortal and divine. Moreover, there is a special pathos in the story, because Prometheus has brought his fate upon himself by his unselfish love of human kind. But Prometheus suffers no mental pain from the thought that one holier than he is his enemy. In character Zeus is inferior to Prometheus, and Prometheus had helped Zeus to the throne, and had good cause to reproach him with ingratitude; he also looked forward to a crisis when Zeus would need his help again, and would be forced to make peace with him. Meanwhile Prometheus defies his persecutor, and declares that he would rather be as he is, would

[1] A. W. Momerie, *Defects of Modern Christianity*, 77.

rather continue nailed to the bleak rock than do the behest of the reigning gods like Hermes, the humble messenger of Zeus.

The Hebrew, on the other hand, descries the immediate action of God everywhere, in all things small and great, good and evil. From such a God, omniscient, omnipotent, the sole Creator and Ruler of heaven and earth, there is no escape. Thus it is the purity of Hebrew revelation that makes the agony intolerable, and renders the spectacle of Job's sorrow unique in literature. The holy and the righteous One is his enemy, He whom Job in the depth of his heart still believes to be holy and righteous, still believes to be merciful and loving, though in the strain and stress of suffering he often speaks as if this faith had died out in him. "Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me, when his candle shined upon my head." Plainly the Hebrew poem is far more subtle and interior than the sublime tragedy of Æschylus.

Even in Buddhism the problem does not exist, though Buddhism, a religion based on the recognition of sorrow, seems to thrill throughout with the consciousness of suffering. The four "Noble Truths" on which it is built are: the reality of sorrow, its cause, its cure, and the way to the cure. The idea that inspires the Buddha is pity, pity for the world's pain. There is no creature too mean for his compassion; the only being too high for it is the saint who has entered into his everlasting rest. But though Buddhism is so touched and possessed with the miseries of man, it does not know the problem that so troubled Israel. To it sorrow is of the very essence of life, inseparable from it; to be is to suffer. It knows a moral order but no moral Deity, a law that fulfils itself through action, that binds act and issue so indissolubly together that every moment of desire or sin must exact its consequent moment of pain. It does not feel the injustice or wrong of the innocent suffering, for to it there is no innocence; it is not conscious of the evil of guiltless sorrow, for to it all sorrow is guilty, all personal being evil. Pessimism is helpless in the face of the evil it bewails, simply accepts it as necessary to existence, abhors and tries to renounce existence that it may escape from evil.

2. With the Hebrews, the thought of God as an *ethical* God seems to have been present from the dawn of their history and

though sometimes it had to struggle almost for existence against other and lower conceptions, yet it was constantly recognized as Israel's inalienable inheritance. In the minds of the prophets of Israel and Judah there burned a real passion for righteousness between man and man; and this was fed by a firm belief in a God who "loveth righteousness and hateth iniquity." Mosaism also had proclaimed with no uncertain tones man's duty towards God. There also "to do right" and "to obey God" are synonymous terms. "Righteousness" is merely another term for "keeping the words of God's covenant." And only they that obey God and do His will can live long and enjoy good days. "If ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments . . . I will give the rain of your land in its season, . . . and I will give grass in thy fields . . . and thou shalt eat and be full." So similarly in Deut. xxviii. and Lev. xxvi. we have a dire and gruesome catalogue of ills that shall befall the people, if they will not hearken to the voice of Jehovah, to observe all His commandments.

¶ The earliest phenomenon likely to be observed connected with the moral government of the world is the general one, that on the whole, as things are constituted, good men prosper and are happy, bad men fail and are miserable. The cause of such a condition is no mystery, and lies very near the surface. As soon as men combine in society, they are forced to obey certain laws under which alone society is possible, and these laws, even in their rudest form, approach the laws of conscience. To a certain extent, every one is obliged to sacrifice his private inclinations; and those who refuse to do so are punished, or are crushed. If society were perfect, the imperfect tendency would carry itself out till the two sets of laws were identical; but perfection so far has been only in Utopia, and, as far as we can judge by experience hitherto, they have approximated most nearly in the simplest and most rudimentary forms of life. Under the systems which we call patriarchal, the modern distinction between sins and crimes had no existence. All gross sins were offences against society, as it then was constituted, and, wherever it was possible, were punished as being so; chicanery and those subtle advantages which the acute and unscrupulous can take over the simple, without open breach of enacted statutes, became possible only under the complications of more artificial polities; and the oppression or injury of man by man was open, violent, obvious, and therefore easily understood. Doubtless, therefore, in such a state of things it would, on the whole, be true to experience that, judging merely by outward

prosperity or the reverse, good and bad men would be rewarded and punished as such in this actual world; so far, that is, as the administration of such rewards and punishments was left in the power of mankind. But theology could not content itself with general tendencies. Theological propositions then, as much as now, were held to be absolute, universal, admitting of no exceptions, and explaining every phenomenon. Superficial generalizations were construed into immutable decrees; the God of this world was just and righteous, and temporal prosperity or wretchedness were dealt out by Him immediately by His own will to His subjects according to their behaviour. Thus the same disposition towards completeness which was the ruin of paganism, here, too, was found generating the same evils; the half truth rounding itself out with falsehoods. Not only the consequences of ill actions which followed through themselves, but the accidents, as we call them, of nature—earthquake, storms, and pestilences—were the ministers of God's justice, and struck sinners only, with discriminating accuracy. That the sun should shine alike on the evil and the good was a creed too high for the early divines, or that the victims of a fallen tower were no greater offenders than their neighbours. The conceptions of such men could not pass beyond the outward temporal consequence; and if God's hand was not there it was nowhere.[1]

3. We find this early stage of the nation's development reflected in the middle part of the Book of Proverbs. It must have been in a time of national prosperity and social quietude that the sages, as the result of prolonged observation, gave forth such maxims as these: "By humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, and honour, and life"; "He that followeth after righteousness and mercy findeth life, righteousness, and honour"; "When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him"; "The fear of the Lord tendeth to life: and he that hath it shall abide satisfied; *he shall not be visited with evil.*" The First Psalm also, which Delitzsch and others consider to be of Solomonic authorship, reveals the same creed as we have been describing, when it declares of the righteous, that "he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper."

To this conviction of the close connexion between sin and suffering, the prophets again and again appealed. Thus Isaiah,

[1] J. A. Froude, *Short Studies on Great Subjects*, i. 290.

speaking to his countrymen when Judah had been scourged by Sennacherib till from head to foot it was one festering sore, chides the infatuation which blinds them to the truth and sternly utters Jehovah's ultimatum: "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: but if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."

4. The problem comes into distinctness in the prophecy of Habakkuk. If Habakkuk saw his vision in the gloomy period before the fall of Jerusalem, his problem arises because he feels so keenly the strange contrast between the fair promise of the happiness that should follow on reform, and the dark fulfilment now that reform has come. If it was during the Exile, then the destruction of the Jewish State and the Captivity are responsible for much of the prophet's perplexity, and the Reformation falls into the background. But though in view of the uncertainties we cannot state problem or solution with precision, yet they may be stated with sufficient accuracy for our purpose. Speaking generally, his problem rises out of the oppression of the righteous and the prosperity of the violent oppressor, while the answer he receives is that retribution is certainly coming, and that the righteous shall live by his firm fidelity to Jehovah.

The prophet's mind is fixed on the certainty of the tyrant's overthrow, even though delay may seem to justify despair. Retribution lay in the nature of things. His empire was based on brutality, so he should perish in the blood that he had spilt. His exploits filled him with an impious arrogance, so Heaven must crush him and vindicate its outraged majesty. In the methods of swelling his empire, and the temper with which success inspired him, lurked the secret of his ruin. All this is a very impressive moral lesson that does not quickly grow out of date, but it adds nothing essentially new. The prosperity of the wicked is not explained; we are simply told that it cannot last.

5. Ezekiel takes a step forward. With remarkable courage he repudiates the earlier conception of solidarity. It is wholly

untrue to say that the Jews are suffering for the sins of their fathers. There is no such thing as vicarious punishment, or vicarious reward. The father cannot suffer for the sin of the son, nor the son for the sin of his father. It is not true that the soul that sins shall escape, and another perish in its stead. The soul that sins, it and no other shall die. "The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him." The misfortunes of the people were therefore not, as they, in agreement with their own historian, urged, a penalty for the sins of Manasseh, but the just reward of their own.

¶ This doctrine of individual responsibility created a revolution in religious thought and life. It is easy to criticise it, and show that the doctrine of solidarity expressed a truth deeply rooted in experience. The old saying is true that the sins of the fathers are visited on the children. We are members one of another, no man lives to himself, our character and conduct alike are largely determined, for good or ill, by forces in whose release we had no share. It is not by denying patent facts that we shall vindicate the order under which we live. Yet Ezekiel's doctrine of individual responsibility is not on that account to be brushed aside as illegitimate. Not only does it express a great truth, but a truth that needed just then to be asserted, even in an exaggerated form. To the man who bore on his conscience the load of a guilt not his own the prophet spoke a liberating word: a man has to answer only for sins he has himself committed. To those who thought that the righteousness of the fathers availed to make good deficiencies of their own the stern law is proclaimed that none can be saved by the good deeds of another, even of the best. There is no transfer of merit, there is, indeed, no superfluous merit to be transferred. "Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord Yahweh."[1]

¶ Your soul, my brother, and mine, they are privileged, they are free. God is the explanation of their mysterious wealth of endowment, the interpretation of their mystic, half-articulated longings. From God they come, to God they go. He is their source, and He their end. To state this is to assert the solemn fact—*responsibility*. Philosophers have fancied that each movement of thought displaces some molecule of the brain, so that every airy fancy registers itself in material fact. Anyhow, *this* is

[1] A. S. Peake, *The Problem of Suffering in the Old Testament*, 24.

true; every free choice of the creature between good and evil has an eternal import, and it may be, it *will* be if you will have it so, a splendid destiny. My brother, in your hurrying, perhaps self-seeking, life, have you thought of *that*?[1]

¶ Responsibility is man's dignity, and it offers him development: every thought that man evolves from his consciousness affects the welfare of the world; and every word that man utters goes about the world seeking a response.

Each new discovery is a new responsibility.

To perceive a duty is to be bound by the perception; and he who sees the heedless on the edge of a precipice, without warning him, is responsible for his death.

He who manfully undertakes his personal responsibilities, often fails to realize his national responsibilities.

When every man seeks the welfare of all men, every man will be happy.

It is an unrecognized vice to do nothing for other men's benefit; a man should seek, not only those who can help him, but those whom he can help: there can be no greater misery than to have helped no one.[2]

II.

The Problem in Job.

It was perhaps as the fifth century was slipping into the past that the poet whose genius made him the peer of the most gifted of our race wrote his mighty work. But while it may take some of its colour from the dark experience of its time, it really contributes little to our understanding of it to connect it closely with any set of historical conditions. It is not with the nation that the poet is concerned, but with the individual, not with Israel but with man, not with God's discipline of His people, but with His government of the world. Of the author we know nothing save what we can glean from the work. He had passed through the most agonizing doubts, had faced without flinching the suffering of mankind, and had fought his way to peace.

¶ Job stands before his destiny as blind as we do before our own in common life, where no poet introduces us into the counsels

[1] W. J. Knox Little, *Manchester Sermons*, 38.

[2] E. G. Cheyne, *The Man with the Mirror* (1914), 113.

of God. Indeed, he is still blinder than we, for we Christians know that the sorrows of this time are only the transition to a future glory; we consider ourselves members of a great body in which no member suffers, whatever befalls him, by himself. Job, on the contrary, knows not the future world. He stands entirely isolated before his God. He can seek the causes of his distress only in God or in himself. What a fearful choice! May the cause lie in himself? No; he does not think of this; he feels himself so pure inwardly that, from the beginning, the question of an offence committed by him does not occur to him. The cause then must lie in God. But what a horrible thought is this! He feels himself forced to this conclusion, but he recoils in horror from it. "Would that I had never been born, would that I were dead," he cries out in torture. In the mouth of a Christian this wish would be blasphemous, but in the mouth of Job it appears to us natural; it is a cry of despair wrung from him not so much by his misfortune as by the blindness of his soul, his ignorance concerning the causes of his fate and the torment of that fearful thought—

> "Why is light given to the sorrowful,
> And life to the troubled in soul; . . .
> To the man whose way is hid,
> And about whom Eloah has made a hedge?"

This *Wherefore* is the kernel of the first lament of Job, which is not a declaration of innocence or a complaint, or a murmuring against God, but a bitter and anxious cry, Wherefore? Were his fate not hidden from him he would bear it boldly, and put Satan to shame. This Wherefore now becomes the fundamental tone of all his speeches, his especial problem, for the solution of which, after he has overcome his first horror and the noble courage of a good conscience has broken forth victoriously, he inquires into all the possibilities in the character of his God; it is the reason why he asks for a Divine manifestation, a clear utterance, a personal revelation of God. The poet has wonderfully mingled truth and error in this discourse. It is true that the cause of his suffering does not lie in Job, but in God; but God, on account of His very righteousness, had to abandon His pious servant to the persecution of Satan. This does not appear to Job because he considers his relation to God as purely as an individual, without reference to the whole sphere of his dominion. It is a noble, but one-sided, individualism which is here involved in enigmas and struggles in distresses.[1]

[1] B. Duhm, in *The New World*, iii. 334.

1. Let us first of all see clearly the general principles of belief on which the Book of Job is founded.

(1) There was, first, the belief that *God is the great cause at work everywhere*; that everything must be traced to Him; that all the phenomena of the world, all the events of life, are but a manifestation of Him. In the words of Professor Davidson, "The philosophy of the wise did not go beyond the origin of sin, or referred it to the freedom of man; but, sin existing, and God being in immediate personal contact with the world, every event was a direct expression of His moral will and energy." This was the first position in the minds of the men of Job's day. To them prosperity and adversity came, not through what we might vaguely call the force of circumstances, but from the hand of God. The afflicted were afflicted by God; it was His hand that lay heavy upon them.

(2) Next, there was the belief that *God is just*, and that His dealings with men are the outcome of His justice. One phase of this belief, as then held, was that suffering is sent by God because of sin; that it is the direct consequence of sin and is proportional to it, so that special suffering must be accounted for by special sinfulness.

(3) Third, there is the further position with which it is beyond reasonable doubt that the friends of Job set out, that *the feelings of God towards a man must be made manifest during this life*, so that ere death the favour of God must shine out over the righteous man, however tossed about by the waves of misfortune he may have been for a time. To them the state of existence beyond the grave brought no thought of retribution, as a state in which to the righteous the calamities of a lifetime would seem as nothing in the everlasting favour of God, while the short-lived pleasures and seeming good fortune of the wicked would be swallowed up in the misery of an existence apart from Him whose lovingkindness is better than life.

¶ If we exclude disciplinary suffering as being simply a natural extension of penal or retributive, then we may say that the Old Testament offers five different attitudes to the problem of the suffering of the innocent (with the related fact of experience, the prosperity of the wicked). These five attitudes in logical, though not chronological, order, are (1) Wait! (2) There

may be life beyond death for the righteous; (3) Life is a dark mystery; (4) Life is the bright mystery of a Divine purpose higher than our grasp; (5) The suffering of the innocent may avail for the guilty. The variety of these suggestions shows how widely the problem was felt, as their fruitfulness shows its intensity. We might almost write a history of Old Testament religion around the simple account of its development. . . .

It is clear that the second, fourth, and fifth of these attitudes or solutions mark a real advance for religion. Besides the fundamental conception of suffering as penal and disciplinary, which continues to hold its proper, if partial, place in any moral view of the world, there is (*a*) the reminder that the portion of life we see is incomplete, and affords no sufficient data for a final judgment; (*b*) the idea of suffering as the necessary test and manifestation of disinterested religion; and (*c*) the conviction of its atoning value for others.[1]

2. The question then is, how to make these fundamental positions consist rationally with the facts of the case—the undoubted fact of Job's calamities, and the seeming fact of his uprightness; or, to decide which of the positions can be abandoned or modified so as to arrive at something like a satisfactory explanation of the facts.

(1) Now we notice first of all, that *Job's righteousness is in no way repudiated*; indeed it is heartily recognized. This picture of the righteous Gentile is incorporated in the Canon; at the end of the book this righteous man is restored to his prosperity and continues to live a life of the same type of righteousness: "the Lord accepted Job"; more than this, his *words* receive the Divine stamp of approval: not only has he spoken better than his friends, but he has spoken the thing that is right about God; he has looked facts in the face and seen rightly that without further explanation they are not consistent with the justice of God; and he has rightly appealed to the facts of his own life; he has a right to set long years of goodness in the balance against the few months of misery; he has rightly clung to his own sense of justice and mercy and purity; he has rightly appealed to the witness of his own consciousness, even though external circumstances seem for the moment to be confirming that opinion. The book then asserts the validity of a man's appeal to the

[1] H. Wheeler Robinson, *The Religious Ideas of the Old Testament*, 171, 177.

witness of his own conscience, to the inherent and inalienable value of his own personality.

(2) But, secondly, we notice that *this righteousness is assigned its true position and proportion.* Job was quite right to appeal to the witness of his own personality against the assertions of his friends; he was right to appeal to his whole lifetime as against the events of a few months; but he had forgotten that God has the same rights. God is (as has been said) "a Being of infinite self-respect"; He ought to be trusted to be doing nothing unworthy of His true nature; He may not stop at every moment to explain His processes; He too may appeal against current notions and temporary appearances to His essential life. In order to be judged, His work must be seen in its entirety from beginning to end; for He too can appeal to great acts of power and majesty and beauty. Thus Jehovah's appeal to His creative acts forms a pendant to Job's appeal to his past life, but drawn on a larger canvas and with a greater emphasis on their intrinsic power. He has laid the foundations of the earth; He has shut up the sea within doors; He has caused the dayspring to know its place; He knows the gates of death, the dwelling of light and darkness, of wind and rain and dew and frost; He controls the planets, the clouds and the lightning; He has given their instincts and their beauty to the wild goat, the ass, the ox, the ostrich, the horse, the hawk, and the eagle, the hippopotamus, and the crocodile. Can Job equal all this? "Hast thou an arm like God, and canst thou thunder with a voice like him?" Nay, might he not remember that this great Creator had created man as well? Might he not trust that one who so cared for the animals would care for him too and ultimately vindicate his righteousness?

(3) Once more, *we have here an appeal from appearances to essential personality*: the lower personality of Job is brought face to face with the higher, the more commanding, personality of Jehovah; and the result is what it must always be when man really faces the thought of what God is. "I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee: wherefore I abhor myself (or, "I loathe my words") and repent in dust and ashes." Human personality at its best is limited and dependent: it will go wrong even in the assertion of its own good acts, unless it recollects its dependence, and bows itself

before its Creator. "Wilt thou condemn me that thou mayest be justified?" Jehovah had asked of Job, and Job came to recognize that he must in the end justify God if he hopes to be justified himself.

Here it is of special interest to note how St. Paul modifies the adaptation which he seems to make of Job's words to himself. St. Paul was as self-conscious, as self-assertive, as Job: he was "touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless": he was a faithful steward of the mysteries of God; he appealed with no less confidence from his detractors to the witness of his own conscience; but he had been brought face to face with a righteousness that was above the law; he knew that all his strength was drawn from a power greater than himself; he too had been a blasphemer and injurious; but he had already had the vision which ultimately humbled Job, and so while with Job he asserts, "I know nothing by myself," he adds quickly, "yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord."

¶ A noble mind has worked itself free out of a narrow creed into one far wider, and as we watch the process, we discern what deep religious instincts may underlie professions of atheism; and we learn what need there is on our part of patience, of sympathy, of loyal facing of all the facts of life, if we are to be of any help to one who is passing through a time of such perplexity; and how in the last resort such an one may have to be left alone with God as his teacher. A righteous soul has passed from a religion in which self is the centre to one in which God is the centre. A high spirit has been brought to a real penitence, a heartfelt confession of its own unworthiness, by the sight of an ideal higher than its own. The natural righteousness of humanity has been respected, humbled and lifted higher as it has learnt to realize its inferiority to the majesty of God.[1]

3. Can we go further without attributing to the author of the book thoughts to which he had not attained? There are two questions: First, Did he find the final solution of the problem in *love*? and, second, Was he strengthened in his trust by the hope of *a life beyond*?

(1) What is the question set in the Prologue? Does Job serve God for nought? In other words, Does any man serve God out of mere love to Him, without thought of reward? God under-

[1] Walter Lock.

takes to prove that there is a man capable of a real and disinterested goodness, while Satan undertakes to prove that the best man's goodness is but a veiled selfishness. And this scene at the beginning is to some extent the key to the inner meaning of the book. It is meant to prove that God is capable of winning, and man capable of cherishing, an unselfish and a disinterested goodness.

Of this Job himself was wholly unconscious. He could not know that he was a spectacle to men and angels; he could not know of the great issue which was to be fought out in his own soul. Had he known that God was proving him through His own capacity of inspiring the highest devotion, his trial would have ceased to be a trial; he would cheerfully have borne anything (any misery by which God could be proved to be what he knew Him to be) by which it could be shown that He could inspire a disinterested love, and that man is capable of a real and unselfish goodness. But *we* can read the innermost teaching and the lesson of this remarkable work. No doubt it teaches us other things. It throws a light on the mystery of human life; it shows that its miseries are corrective, and not punitive, that the wrongs of time are to be redressed; but it has this deeper intention and purpose always behind, viz., to vindicate God and man at once, to show that, amid whatever doubts and perplexities and difficulties, Satan's taunt can be answered. "Job does serve God for nought." God is capable of inspiring a disinterested affection; man is able to rise to the heights of one—"though he slay me, yet will I trust in him."

And the Epilogue agrees with the Prologue. It is love called forth by love exhibited, and answering to it with eagerness. "So the Lord *blessed* (not "rewarded") the latter end of Job more than the beginning." The restoration of Job does not then rest upon any servile notion of works of merit, but upon the value which love sets upon love. Love appreciates love above all things—loves essentially only it. If God is Love, and if, being such, He has willed to be loved, how should He not in His turn, having found what He seeks, manifest Himself emphatically as the loving God? Were He to act otherwise, His creature would be better than Himself.

¶ Most of us, at one time or other of our lives, have known

something of love—of that only pure love in which no *self* is left remaining. We have loved as children, we have loved as lovers; some of us have learnt to love a cause, a faith, a country; and what love would that be which existed only with a prudent view to after-interests. Surely there is a love which exults in the power of self-abandonment, and can glory in the privilege of suffering for what is good. *Que mon nom soit flétri pourvu que la France soit libre,* said Danton; and those wild patriots who had trampled into scorn the faith in an immortal life in which they would be rewarded for what they were suffering, went to their graves as beds, for the dream of a people's liberty. Justice is done; the balance is not deranged. It only seems deranged, as long as we have not learnt to serve without looking to be paid for it.

Such is the theory of life which is to be found in the Book of Job; a faith which has flashed up in all times and all lands, wherever high-minded men were to be found, and which passed in Christianity into the acknowledged creed of half the world. The cross was the new symbol, the Divine sufferer the great example; and mankind answered to the call, because the appeal was not to what was poor and selfish in them, but to whatever of best and bravest was in their nature. The law of reward and punishment was superseded by the law of love.[1]

O God, I love Thee mightily,
Not only for Thy saving me,
Nor yet because who love not Thee
Must burn throughout eternity.
Thou, Thou, my Jesu, once didst me
Embrace upon the bitter Tree.
For me the nails, the soldier's spear,
With injury and insult, bear—
In pain all pain exceeding,
In sweating and in bleeding,
Yea, very death, and that for me
A sinner all unheeding!
O Jesu, should I not love Thee
Who thus hast dealt so lovingly—
Not hoping some reward to see,
Nor lest I my damnation be;
But, as Thyself hast lovèd me,
So love I now and always Thee,
Because my King alone Thou art,
Because, O God, mine own Thou art![2]

[1] J. A. Froude, *Short Studies on Great Subjects*, i. 324.
[2] R. H. Benson, *Poems* (1914), 45.

(2) The question of a future vindication is very difficult. The chief passage on which it is based (xix. 23–27) is difficult to translate and is often made to carry a surer belief than it expresses. But there are considerations in favour of the contention that Job looked forward to a life beyond death. As given by Professor Davidson they are as follows:

(*a*) Job asserts that though he die with God's face hidden from him, and under the reproach of being a transgressor, this perverse and cruel fate shall not for ever prevail over him; God shall yet appear to vindicate his innocence and he shall see Him to his joy.

(*b*) It is certain that Job does not anticipate restoration to health and prosperity in this life. His disease was to him the seal of God's estrangement from him. It was God's witness to his guilt. It was this moral meaning which his death had that caused him so to wrestle against it. It seems impossible that Job could have conceived God declaring to men and to himself his innocence *while* He continued to afflict him fatally with his disease.

Having, then, the conviction that he cannot recover from his illness, Job's thoughts are carried beyond this life. Can his beliefs expand in this direction so as to leave room for the element of his suffering? It seems all too daring. Such a thing has scarce been thought of. Has not Sheol been in all ages but the dull shadowy life, or rather existence, where all are alike, in which God is not, and when all opportunity of being acknowledged by Him is irrevocably gone? And yet the possibility is forced upon him. He sees it, but recoils from it as a baseless illusion—as, in fact, an impossibility. But it cannot be lightly thrown aside, for it is the only way left in which there seems the least chance of a solution of the difficulties which are pressing upon him. He tries to quiet the flutter which the very thought has raised in his heart by giving expression to his old belief:

> "Man dieth, and wasteth away:
> Yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he?"
> . . . . . .
> "Man lieth down and riseth not:
> Till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake,
> Nor be roused out of their sleep."

But it is in vain that he asks, "If a man die, shall he live again?" The old words have lost their certainty. He begins to feel that he may live again if God is just. The idea becomes stronger and stronger, coming back to him more vividly after each repulse, till at last, seeing how completely every other way of escape is shut up, he feels that it must be so, and bursts out into a confession of faith in God that pierces beyond the grave:

"I know that my redeemer liveth,
And that he shall stand up at the last upon the earth:
And after my skin hath been thus destroyed,
Yet from [without] my flesh shall I see God:
Whom I shall see for myself,
And mine eyes shall behold, and not another.
My reins are consumed within me [with longing]."

If, however, we must conclude that Job looked for this appearance of God on his behalf, and this vision of Him to his joy, not previous to his death, we must not attempt to fill up the outline which he has drawn. We must take care not to complete his sketch out of events that transpired long after his day, or out of beliefs, reposing on these events, that are now current among ourselves. The English Version has done so at the expense of the original. The great thought which filled Job's imagination was the thought that God would appear to manifest his innocence, and that he should see Him in peace and reconciliation. This thought was so intense that it almost realized itself. Job's assurance of seeing God was so vivid that it virtually became a vision of God, and he faints in the ecstasy of his faith. In such a condition of mind the preliminaries and the circumstances that would occur to a mind in a calmer state, or which immediately occur to us, do not obtrude themselves; and if we are rightly to conceive Job's state of mind we must entirely exclude them. We should be wrong to say that he contemplates a purely spiritual vision of God, and further wrong to say that he contemplates being invested with a new body when he shall see God. Neither thought is present to his mind, which is entirely absorbed in the idea of seeing God. The ideas of Old Testament saints regarding the condition of man after death were too obscure to permit of any such formal and precise conception as that which we call a spiritual sight of God. Besides, as the kind of half ecstasy under

which Job here speaks has fallen on him when a living man, it is probable that, like all persons in such conditions, he carries over with him his present circumstances into his vision after death, and seems to himself to be such a man as he is now when he sees God.

Around my path life's mysteries
  Their deepening shadows throw;
And as I gaze and ponder,
  They dark and darker grow.

Yet still, amid the darkness,
  I feel the light is near;
And in the awful silence
  God's voice I seem to hear.

But I hear it as the thunder,
  Or the murmuring of the sea;
The secret it is telling,—
  But it tells it not to me.

Then I ask the wise and learned
  If they the thing can show;
But the longer they discourse thereon,
  The less I seem to know.

So I seek again the silence,
  And the lonely darkness too;
They teach me deeper lessons
  Of the Holy, Vast, and True.

And I hear a voice above me
  Which says,—"Wait, trust, and pray;
The night will soon be over,
  And light will come with day."

To Him I yield my spirit,
  On Him I lay my load:
Fear ends with death; beyond it
  I nothing see but God.[1]

[1] W. R. Greg.

III.

The Problem after Job.

The Book of Job is a rich mine of teaching and of consolation, yet there are points in which its teaching is clearly inadequate. The hold on a future life is admittedly precarious. The assurance of the nineteenth chapter was a height which the soul of Job was "competent to gain," but incompetent to hold; and there is little more than a hint of the value of suffering as helping a man to help others, as opening his heart to sympathize with their sorrows, as enabling him to win access to their hearts and so to bear their burdens and even to atone for their sins. The writer falls short in this respect of the author of the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah: how much shorter does Job's language fall of the words and of the action of Him who in the Upper Chamber, in Gethsemane, and on Calvary made suffering the channel through which the fullest stream of blessing still flows for all mankind. Think of the tone of scorn in which Job is still able to speak of the outcast natives, "whose fathers I disdained to set with the dogs of my flock." "Among the bushes they bray; under the nettles they are gathered together. They are children of fools, yea, children of base men; they were scourged out of the land"; it has never occurred to him that, as he too is a leprous outcast, he has been brought near to them and might have learnt sympathy with their misery. Who can judge Job harshly for this? who is competent to judge him at all, unless it be some innocent sufferer who has himself been brought down into utter wretchedness and is looking for the stroke that is to end his life? We may not judge him, but we may look away from him to that noble Sufferer, one no less perfect and upright, one that equally feared God and eschewed evil, one equally despised and rejected of men, one who, unlike Job, was never righted and vindicated on this side of the grave; we may watch Him in His agony, with His three friends equally powerless to help or sympathize; we may hear Him on the cross, feeling for one moment a sense of desertion by God keener than Job could feel, and yet hear Him pleading for friend and foe and trustfully commending His Spirit to the Father—and we shall

thus know best how far the Book of Job falls short of the highest teaching about the suffering of the innocent.

1. Following Professor Peake in his book on *The Problem of Suffering in the Old Testament*, we notice how the problem is dealt with in the later psalms. There are three psalms which deal specifically with the problem — Psalms xxxvii., xlix., and lxxiii.

(1) The first of these is an alphabetical psalm, and we are therefore prepared to find considerable repetition, and no strict development of the thought. The author rebukes complaints against God on account of the prosperity of the wicked, and bids his readers be not envious of them. Rather let them wait patiently on Jehovah, for if they delight in Him, He will give them their heart's desire, and make their righteousness go forth as the light. Vexation at the success of the godless leads only to evil doing. Why indeed should they nourish vexation? The wicked plot the death of the righteous, but Jehovah mocks, for it is their own death that is coming. Soon the judgment is to burst, when they will be rooted out of the land, and will vanish like smoke. Those that are cursed of Him shall be cut off. But the humble who wait on Jehovah shall inherit the land for ever, and have delight in abundance of peace. Better then to have little like the righteous than to have the wealth of the wicked. And even under present conditions, the righteous man and his children do not come to want. Moreover, even before the judgment on the wicked comes, examples are to be seen of the unrighteous flourishing like the cedars of Lebanon, but suddenly cut off. Probably there is no reference to the after life in verses 37 and 38, though it is uncertain whether the meaning is that there is a posterity or a future to the man of peace, but not to the wicked. The Psalm would have been in place in the Book of Proverbs, it is deservedly a favourite for devotional reading, but it does not advance the solution of the problem.

(2) Psalm xlix. is much more striking. The author propounds the question why he should fear in time of calamity, when the wealthy seek to overthrow him. No man can ransom himself from Sheol, or secure for himself an earthly immortality. Wise and fool alike die. The grave is their house for ever and man

perishes like the beasts. Death drives the self-confident down to Sheol, as a shepherd drives his flock, while the upright rule over them in the morning. But the Psalmist expresses the confidence that God will ransom him from Sheol and take him. Therefore there is no need for fear when a man grows rich, for at death he must leave his riches behind him. The contrast lies between what the wicked cannot buy from God and what the Psalmist receives from God as an act of grace. Such a contrast would be given if the writer said that, while the wicked died, he lived on upon earth. But that is not the contrast he has in mind. All must die, he as well as the rest. But while the wicked are driven down to the dim underworld, God saves him, when he dies, from this fate, and takes him to live with Himself.

(3) Psalm lxxiii. strikes a still deeper note. It opens with a confession of God's goodness to the pure in heart, which springs from the experience that the Psalmist is going to describe. For this conviction had not been reached without a hard struggle, in which his faith had all but failed him. His own life had been lived in purity, yet he had suffered without respite. And in glaring contrast to his own lot was the prosperity of the wicked. They were free from pangs, lived in perfect health, and were untroubled by the miseries that oppress the rest of mankind. As he considered their fortunate lot, he felt that his own efforts for purity had been misspent, for he had been exposed to the constant buffeting of fate. As he thought, so also he spoke, and, Israelite though he was, he became faithless to his people. Yet though he uttered this traitorous conclusion, the problem still vexed his mind. And as he pondered it, he was initiated into God's sacred mysteries and saw the dark destiny prepared for the godless. The veil that hides the future which awaits men after death was lifted for him. There in the other world he saw how God dashed them down to ruin in a moment, how they were dragged into the depths appalled with nameless terrors. How foolish then to be perplexed at their prosperity, so grievous to him in the dream of his ignorance, so contemptible now that he has awakened to a true knowledge of the future! Death must come, but not death itself can separate him from the love of God. He will be taken to that glory in which God dwells. What, then, has heaven or earth to offer him, since God is the sole possession

in which he takes delight? His powers may fail him, his body waste away, but for evermore it is God who is his strength and portion.

¶ A great volume might be filled with anecdotes associated with the early and most celebrated of Luther's hymns, "Ein' feste Burg ist unser Gott" ("A safe stronghold our God is still"). We read of it over and over again in the vicissitudes of his own life, which were as many and great as those of the Hebrew king who wrote and composed the psalm of which it is a paraphrase. Often in dark and troublesome times he would say to Melanchthon or other friends, "Let us sing the forty-sixth psalm"; and then the troubled hearts were stayed, and the weary feet stood firm on the Divine Rock. Luther and his companions chanted the words of the hymn as they entered Worms, to meet the hosts of the prince of this world. Many a time in Luther's life, both in private sorrows and in public troubles, the words of this song and prayer of faith brought comfort and strength. And it was bequeathed to after-times as one of the grandest and most powerful weapons in conflict. It was this hymn which the brave and pious Gustavus Adolphus, the King of Sweden, and the hero of the Thirty Years' War, sang on the morning of the battle of Lützen. After he had drawn up his army on that morning, the whole of the troops with the king at their head sang, "Ein' feste Burg ist unser Gott," to the accompaniment of trumpets. They were nerved thereby for the unequal conflict, as they could have been by no other means, and they fought heroically for God and the truth. This hymn of Luther has been more than "the Marseillaise of the Reformation," as some one has called it, preserving to this hour its powerful energy and Divine expression, and may some day again startle us with its sonorous and iron-girt words in similar contests.[1]

2. Not all Jews could take refuge from the miseries of the present in glowing pictures of a glorious future. Where faith has lost its spring, the earnest soul that is keenly sensitive to the miseries of mankind drifts easily towards pessimism. Such was the case of him to whom we owe the Book of Ecclesiastes. In the main he has a definite view of life. This is that all is vanity. As he looks back on his own career and sums up its impression, this is the verdict he deliberately passes on it. Life is meaningless and a mockery, since man's powers crave a sphere of action, and their exercise achieves no abiding result. There is no

[1] James Macaulay, *Luther Anecdotes*, 85.

remedy for the ills of life, but there is some mitigation. "A man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry." "There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and make his soul enjoy good in his labour." This is the gift of God to be taken and used, without anxious fear whether it is right or wrong. "Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God hath already accepted thy works." The author does not recommend a debased sensualism; he speaks with bitterness of "the woman whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands as bands." It is rather a moderate enjoyment of the good things of life, its simple pleasures, food and drink, and wedded life. The extremes alike of indulgence and of restraint should be avoided: "Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over wise: why shouldest thou destroy thyself? Be not over much wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldest thou die before thy time?"

¶ It is not imperfect Christianity that we find in Ecclesiastes, but rather the negation of all that makes the gospel dear. Yet, if we are content to look at the question from a historical point of view, we shall see good reason to rejoice that it was included in the Canon. The edifying additions which turned it into a more pious work helped to check the mischief it might otherwise have done to those with a mechanical and unhistorical conception of revelation. But, for a sounder view, these additions are not needful to justify its presence in Scripture. For we see in the Old Testament a preparation for Christ. Such a preparation was not simply along the line of anticipation and approach. Rightly to appraise Christianity we required an object lesson which should convince us how much the world needed it. The moral bankruptcy of Greece and Rome presents us with an impressive example of what we are seeking. But Judaism, was it not competent to carry through the world's reformation? We cannot forget the close approximations to Christianity which, at its best, the religion of Israel achieved. But we do well to ponder also the darker side. Its legalism, its tedious casuistry, its danger of self-righteousness, its narrow exclusiveness, its bitter vindictiveness, all these must be taken into account; while we must never forget how needful it is for us to cleanse our own religion from these faults by strenuous fidelity to the spirit and temper of the gospel. And Ecclesiastes is here peculiarly instructive. It puts the logic of a non-Christian position with tremendous force, to all who feel keenly the misery of the world. More vividly than

anything else in the Old Testament, it shows us how imperious was the necessity for the revelation of God in Christ.[1]

3. Come then to Christ and Christianity. The Christian preacher has to confess that to consider the world in its length and breadth, the defeat of good, the success of evil, physical pain, mental anguish, the prevalence and intensity of sin, that condition of the whole race, so fearfully yet exactly described in the Apostle's words, "having no hope and without God in the world" —all this is a vision to bewilder and appal, and inflicts upon the mind the sense of a profound mystery which is absolutely beyond human solution. In a study of Robert Browning, Sir Henry Jones remarks that "there is nothing more admirable in his attitude, or more inspiring in his teaching, than the manly frankness with which he endeavours to confront the manifold miseries of human life, and to constrain them to yield, as their ultimate meaning and reality, some spark of good." If Faith is to secure and retain the allegiance of the modern mind, it must somehow come to terms with the enigma of suffering, and be able, if not to explain it, at least to render it tolerable. No problem is more worthy of mental toil. Grant that human reason can never wholly solve it, that clouds and darkness must ever be round about it, yet even to state it correctly is no small help, while to discuss it, to offer tentative and partial solutions of it, may place the intelligence in a position of superiority to it.

Now Christianity does not profess to solve completely the mystery of pain. But it offers much that throws light upon it. It holds as firmly as Job's three friends held that sin is invariably followed by suffering. "Be not deceived, God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." But suffering is no longer to be viewed as simply penal: it issues from no principle of retaliation or vindictiveness as an equivalent in evil to be borne for evil done. Rather is it to be regarded in all cases as corrective, at least in intent. It is not only, as in the doctrine of Eliphaz, when it falls on men whose general character is good that it is remedial in its purpose; the same purpose is there when it falls on the most abandoned. It is designed to make the sinner stop and realize the wickedness of the course he has been

[1] A. S. Peake, *The Problem of Suffering in the Old Testament*, 134.

pursuing, in the hope that such realization will lead to penitence, and penitence in turn to restoration. And it may likewise play the part of warning to keep men back from sin, and so prevent the contagion of evil from spreading. The sight of the inevitable consequence of wrong-doing does much to rob temptation of its power.

But the great difference between the sufferings of Job and the sufferings of good men to-day, between the shadows beforehand of that One Sufferer and the shadows and reflections afterwards, is this: Those who can look upon the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ with instructed eyes can see the meaning of the long history of human woe as it could not be seen before. They can understand the meaning of redemption, and the way in which it has pleased God to accomplish it for man. They see not only the suffering that sin brings upon the evil-doer, but the suffering that it inevitably brings upon others, and the suffering by which alone the victory over it is to be gained. They can see in Christ God Himself doing battle with this great foe, His hatred of the sin, His compassion for the sinner, and the Captain of man's salvation made perfect, as such, through sufferings. They can hear the taunt levelled at the Crucified One, "He saved others, himself he cannot save," and know it true in a sense that was not intended by the speakers; for because He would save others, therefore Himself He could not, and would not, seek to save. That work of redemption has been wrought out once for all. Yet in a measure it holds that all who would be Christ's must learn this Divine secret of His, and "fill up on their part that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ for his body's sake, which is the church." It is for the Job of to-day to suffer gladly, as the Job of primitive times was unable to do. Every sufferer for righteousness' sake may, in the Master's words, "rejoice and be exceeding glad"; may, in the words of His faithful follower who at one time rebelled so fiercely at the notion of the Suffering Righteous One, "rejoice inasmuch as he is partaker of Christ's sufferings." He upon whom rests the "Spirit of glory and of God" cannot be crushed under any load of pain.

Finally, what Christianity whispered in the ears of men—that the gain of each is the gain of all and the loss of each is the

loss of all, and that this applies not only to families and nations but to all mankind—that lesson is now beginning to be proclaimed on the house-tops; for the increasing communication and intercourse of men with each other is gradually causing them to realize, slowly and almost in spite of themselves, that if one member suffers all the others must suffer with him. At least we can say that good men are realizing more than ever they did before the solidarity of mankind, the duty of aiding and protecting the poor and the weak, and of endeavouring to lift those who are ignorant and vicious above the darkness amid which, as Christ has told us, they know not what they do.

¶ The Book of Job bears a relationship to *In Memoriam* which has not been, so far as I know, duly credited. In making a comparison of the two productions, we gain a point of view from which I conceive the Book of Job can be seen in its development. Not that the English poet had in thought the great Hebrew when he gave us his analysis of sorrow as well as its evolution; but because affliction as experienced by different souls will take much the same form and in its development will follow in any age much the same course, we have this interesting parallel.

Tennyson's poem was born, as all know, of a crushing sorrow. Arthur Hallam's death was the occasion of its being written, but the moving cause was to ease the poet's heart:

> For the unquiet heart and brain,
> A use in measured language lies;

and so to wrap himself in words, "as in coarsest cloth against the cold," he sets about to write. Whether men who write "under inspiration" know at the time the full import of their attempts, and the use the world will make of them, is doubtful. It is no reflection upon the author of the Book of Job, or upon Paul the Apostle, to say the books written by both were afterwards used by the world in ways far beyond what their authors dreamed. We can well understand how an ancient Hebrew writer, convinced that he has found the true secret of affliction, pours out his utterances in "measured language," using different characters to typify different phases of one and the same error, while the hero, Job, moving in a much higher realm, resists them, though he is unable to find the whole truth till God appears, when all is made plain. We can understand how the author's heart was eased in writing this book, and how with confidence he committed it to the world—feeling that it contained the truth, yet not realizing

that he had written something which many capable of judging declare is the noblest of all things ever written.

In the development of thought both in the Book of Job and in *In Memoriam* we meet at the first conventional comforters. Tennyson says friends came to him to say "loss is common," that "other friends remain"—and with such well-worn phrases showed how far they were from appreciating his grief, and how inadequate were their attempts to comfort him. Their words rather embittered than consoled, and certain parts of the English's poet's work sound much like Job's challenge of the Almighty as to why such suffering as his was ever permitted.

Both poems have a decided turning point, and it is where the consciousness comes to each man that human help is vain, and that the problem must be worked out by the sufferer alone, relying upon God to aid him. Even further than this we can push our parallel. We see in *In Memoriam* an intimation of a better mind when the poet says:

I hold it true, whate'er befall;
I feel it, when I sorrow most;
'Tis better to have loved and lost
Than never to have loved at all.

With this intimation of coming light, we follow the development of thought till the writer becomes prophetic, suggesting Browning in his glad and bright outlook:

O, yet we trust that somehow good
Will be the final goal of ill,
To pangs of nature, sins of will,
Defects of doubt, and taints of blood;

That nothing walks with aimless feet;
That not one life shall be destroy'd,
Or cast as rubbish to the void,
When God hath made the pile complete.

We feel sure that after this sentiment Tennyson will come into the full light, which he does. He finally comes to find his loved Arthur "on the rolling air" and "in the rising sun"; he feels him "in star and flower," as a power diffused, yet as a personality loved not less but more. Then as the light of morning breaks into the flood of day, God's great purpose is seen, and firm belief in immortality swallows up the poet's grief. The close of the poem is one glad song of faith and praise.

In the Book of Job, long ere we find the patriarch boldly asserting his faith that God will appear to vindicate him, we see intimations of "turn" in thought. We see the last cable cut that binds him to human aid. We see him at first drifting till, strengthening himself to meet the cruel waves, he surmounts all successfully, and a prophecy of triumph makes us sure he will triumph, which he finally does. While Arthur Hallam's death brought, by regular development, the pure but not over-serious English poet to earnest thought and finally to firm faith in immortality, so the afflictions of Job (call him the patriarch or the author of the book) brought him by the same hard but sure way to a faith in God and God's control of all things, till he could say with St. Paul in the after years: "All things work together for good to them that love God."[1]

[1] J. O. Knott, in *The Methodist Review*, July 1910.

JOB.

II.

THE BOOK.

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The Book of Job.

I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear;
But now mine eye seeth thee,
Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent
In dust and ashes.—Job xlii. 5, 6.

1. In the Book of Job the poetical genius of Israel reaches its noblest height. In range of imagination and sustained splendour of diction, the book not merely stands alone in the Old Testament, but takes a foremost place also among the masterpieces of the world's literature. Nor is it expositors alone who have been fascinated by the spell of this sublime poem. Tennyson but expresses the common feeling of literary critics when he pronounces it "the greatest poem whether of ancient or of modern times." It is hardly possible to speak of it to an educated and thoughtful man who does not acknowledge its extraordinary power, its unrivalled excellence; while men of genius to whom the greatest works of literature in many languages are familiar, are forward to confess that it stands alone, far above all other and similar performance.

¶ I call that, apart from all theories about it, one of the grandest things ever written with pen. One feels, indeed, as if it were not Hebrew; such a noble universality, different from noble patriotism or sectarianism, reigns in it. A noble Book; all men's Book! It is our first, oldest statement of the never-ending Problem—man's destiny, and God's ways with him here in this earth. And all in such free flowing outlines; grand in its sincerity, in its simplicity; in its epic melody, and repose of reconcilement. There is the seeing eye, the mildly understanding heart. So *true* everyway; true eyesight and vision for all things; material things no less than spiritual: the Horse—"hast thou clothed his neck with *thunder*?"—he "*laughs* at the shaking of the spear!" Such living likenesses were never since drawn. Sublime sorrow, sublime reconciliation; oldest choral melody as of the heart of mankind;—so soft, and great; as the summer

midnight, as the world with its seas and stars! There is nothing written, I think, in the Bible or out of it, of equal literary merit.[1]

2. The Book of Job is a product of the so-called "Wisdom Literature" of the ancient Hebrews; in other words, it belongs to the same branch of literature to which Proverbs and Ecclesiastes also belong, which embraced the observation of human nature, the analysis of conduct, the study of action in its consequences, and the consideration of the moral problems presented by human life and society. It is indeed the crown and glory of the Hebrew "Wisdom." The sphere which "Wisdom" made its own embraced the observation of character and the analysis of experience. It did not concern itself with the dogmas of the national religion. These it took for granted, and went on to study human life from a wider point of view. It aimed at formulating maxims of conduct applicable to mankind in general, and throwing light upon questions which the common experience raised. Hence we remark as characteristic of the "Wisdom" books the absence of everything peculiarly Israelite. The Book of Proverbs contains no mention of Israel: Jehovah, the covenant name of God, does not occur in Ecclesiastes.

In the Book of Job this catholicity is fully exemplified. The scene of the story is laid outside the territory occupied by Israel; none of the persons who figure in it are Israelites; there are no references to laws or institutions distinctively Mosaic, on allusions to events in the national history. The name Jehovah, while it is used in the narrative portions, occurs only twice on the lips of the speakers, and in both instances (i. 21, xii. 9) in what seem to be proverbial expressions. With these exceptions God is referred to by the names El, Eloah, and El-Shaddai (Almighty), and is worshipped after the patriarchal fashion. Even those epithets which were closely associated with Jehovah in common Hebrew speech are avoided, and God is nowhere described as "merciful," "gracious," "slow to anger." A feature in the "Wisdom" books which can hardly escape notice is the wealth of illustration drawn from nature and natural history. The "wise men" in search of picturesque and gnomic expression were keen observers of things

[1] T. Carlyle, *On Heroes and Hero-Worship*, 45.

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around them, and it is consistent with their general breadth of view that they should have relied so much on those objects which were familiar, not to Israel only, but to all mankind.

¶ Essentially a people's literature is this Hebrew Wisdom; this, too, in the more natural and ordinary sense. Not an official utterance, it rises out of the people's everyday work and practical affairs, giving voice to the thoughts with which their lives are most conversant. To kings and labourers alike it gives direction and guidance: gathering wisdom for men when they go to the temple for prayer, and when they go to the city-gate for counsel; walking with them in the field where they toil and in the market-place where they bargain. Its note is eminently individual; herein lies one of its distinctive characteristics. Law and ritual are prescribed for the congregation; prophecy addresses itself to the nation at large, reading the nation's history in the Divine light. The counsel of the wise concerns man as man; and in no other department of the literature are we brought so near the great heart of the nation, so near to men's common and secular pursuits, as in this, where untitled and unmitred men take upon themselves to speak out freely and in the natural style what is in them. For this very reason, also, no other literature is so hard to connect, in our reading of it, with national events. To find its era and origin we must find how it answers to the general pervasive spirit of an age.[1]

I.

Its Age.

What must have been the age, and what the nation, out of which such a book could grow? What general vogue of thinking could have environed such colossal thought? Genius may indeed be a mighty tree, growing from an unseen germ to be the one commanding object of the plain; but it is rooted in the same soil that nourishes the shrubs at its feet. A great work of literature both feeds its age and is fed by it. What the book returns, in transmuted and vitalized form, to its generation is what it has already gathered out of the hopes and needs and problems that surround it. Not that the highest literature is merely the echo of the people's surging thought, and no more;

[1] J. F. Genung.

it is rather the utterance of those who, making the universal cause their own, stand nearest the light, and bring the people's inarticulate longings to expression. The poets of an age, when they let their open and genuine hearts speak, are its truest seers. In them we hear, not one man alone, but the vast body of the time, pervaded by a spirit of hope or doubt or inquiry; a spirit voiceless, until the Æolian strings of the poet's heart feel and answer to its breathings; a spirit unguided, until the seer's own disciplined and originative personality conducts it to its dimly sought rest. This is the truth to-day, and has been ever since we could first trace the connexion of literature with history; may we not say that something like it was equally a truth in the time of Job? And when this Book of Job comes home to the general spiritual need as freshly as if it had been written to meet the maladies of this Christian century, may we not say that its involution is equal to its evolution, and that there was a great heart of the people in that old time out of which the book grew and to which it thrilled responsive as it does to ours?

Formerly, in days when the book was commonly treated as a narrative of literal history, and the truth of a *progress* in the revelation and beliefs of the Old Testament had not been reached, its composition was assigned to the supposed age of the patriarch himself, and Moses was sometimes suggested as a possible author. But though the narrative of the Prologue and the Epilogue is in the general style of parts of the Book of Genesis, and though Job is represented as a patriarch, surrounded by his dependants, rich in pastures and flocks, offering sacrifice as the head of his family, and attaining patriarchal longevity, these constitute very insufficient grounds for assigning the book itself to such an early age. Indeed, a careful consideration of its contents brings to light unmistakable indications that it belongs to a far later and maturer stage of Israelite history. The antique, patriarchal colouring of the portrait of Job in chapters i., ii., and xlii., must be attributed to the skill of the author, who preserved the general features of the age that he was describing, aided no doubt by his own knowledge of the character of an Arab sheikh, which can hardly have differed materially from what it had been many centuries before.

Thus in considering the date of the book it must be borne in mind that there are two different questions, which need to be

kept entirely distinct from each other: (1) What is the date at which the scene of the story is laid? (2) At what period was the poem containing it written?

1. *The Story.*—The scene of the story is laid *in patriarchal times.* The author has skilfully thrown the colours of this age over his composition and preserved its general features. Thus, though employing the Israelite name Jehovah himself, he allows the speakers in the book to use the Divine names peculiar to patriarchal times, as *El, Eloah, Almighty.* No doubt he betrays his own nationality, which he has no desire to conceal, by letting the name Jehovah escape two or three times from the mouth of Job, in current formulas into which the name entered. Again, like the great forefathers of Israel, Job is represented as rich in cattle and flocks. In like manner Job, the head of the family, is also its priest and offers sacrifice, although in another place he is made to say of God that "He leadeth priests away stripped." Further, the sacrifice in use is the "burnt-offering," as in ancient times, before the more developed ritual in Israel came into operation. The great age, too, to which Job attains is patriarchal, though Bildad speaks as if the age of men of his day was greatly reduced in comparison with former standards. The money referred to is the ancient *kesitah*; and the musical instruments named are the simple ones of primitive times. And, to mention no more, historical allusions of any directness are usually to the great events of the patriarchal world.

2. *The Poem.*—While all these indications combine to point to an early date for the events narrated, there are equally conclusive reasons for assigning a comparatively late date to the poem. The Jewish tradition embodied in the Talmud, that Moses wrote Job as well as "his own book," is absolutely worthless. The whole passage in which the statement occurs is manifestly destitute of historical value, and the tradition may be safely disregarded.

(1) By various *incidental allusions* the writer betrays his own position and date. The facts that probable indications of a knowledge of the Law occur in the book, and that the writer habitually uses in his own person the covenant name Jehovah,

show that he is removed by some distance of time from the date assigned to his hero. So while he makes Job himself, as head of the household, offer sacrifices, yet he suffers a mention of *priests* to escape his lips in xii. 19, and, as we have said, the covenant name Jehovah is not quite rigidly excluded from his speeches. Again, the mention of Ophir in xxii. 24, xxviii. 16 is hardly consistent with a date earlier than Solomon's day. The references to serfdom and forced labour in xxiv. 9 may be thought to imply a time after the Israelites had reduced the Canaanites to a state of servitude; nor does the allusion to the "unclean" in xxxvi. 14 favour an early date, while the notices of the administration of justice in the gate, and the references to legal procedure scattered throughout the book imply an acquaintance with a somewhat advanced state of civilization and settled society. The reference to the temptation to worship the heavenly bodies is best illustrated from 2 Kings xvii. 16, xxi. 3, 5, etc., and the mention of "the Satan" finds its only parallel in Zech. iii. 1, 2; 1 Chron. xxi. 1, both late passages.

(2) Further, *the evidence of language* is in favour of a relatively late date. On this it will be sufficient to cite Dr. Driver, who says: "The syntax is extremely idiomatic; but the vocabulary contains a very noticeable admixture of Aramaic words, and (in a minor degree) of words explicable only from the Arabic. This is an indication of a date more or less contemporary with II Isaiah; though it appears that the author came more definitely within the range of Aramaizing influences than the author of Isaiah xl.–lxvi., and perhaps had his home in proximity to Aramaic- and Arabic-speaking peoples."

(3) *The character of the question discussed* perhaps points to the same period. The problem which pressed so heavily upon Job was the difficulty of reconciling his calamities with the orthodox doctrine of retribution. The simple teaching of early days concerning earthly prosperity as the reward of faithful service of God and suffering as the penalty of sin has broken down, and there is nothing to set in its place. This fact of itself probably indicates a comparatively late date, and best suits a time when calamity was overtaking God's people, and God's ancient promises might seem to be failing. The same kind of question is discussed in Psalms xlix. and lxxiii., both of which are probably late; and

we see from Ezekiel and Jeremiah how heavily the very same problem weighed on the minds of devout Israelites during the closing years of the kingdom and at the date of the Babylonian Captivity; and it is hard to resist the conclusion that the Book of Job belongs to the same general period.

3. *The Author.*—As to the author of the book we are in complete ignorance. He has been supposed to be Job himself, Elihu, Moses, Solomon, Heman the Ezrahite, author of Ps. lxxxviii., Isaiah, Hezekiah, author of the hymn Is. xxxviii., Baruch the friend of Jeremiah, and who not? There are some minds that cannot put up with uncertainty, and are under the necessity of deluding themselves into quietude by fixing on some known name. There are others to whom it is a comfort to think that in this omniscient age a few things still remain mysterious. Uncertainty is to them more suggestive than exact knowledge. No literature has so many great anonymous works as that of Israel. The religious life of this people was at certain periods very intense, and at these periods the spiritual energy of the nation expressed itself almost impersonally, through men who forgot themselves and were speedily forgotten in name by others.[1]

II.

Its Place.

To reach the time and scenery, we dare not say in which the unknown author lived, but at all events to which he seems to summon us, we must pass back beyond the cradle of Roman greatness and of Greek genius; back through the whole series of God's dealings with the sons of Israel; we must plant our feet outside the furthest limits of the Holy Land; among men and races who worship indeed the one God and Ruler of the universe, but who know nothing of the distinction between Jew and Gentile; nothing of the heroic age of Joshua or of Gideon; nothing of the glories of David or of the greatness of Solomon; nothing of the walls of Zion, or the Temple of Jerusalem. We breathe, at every breath we draw, the free air of the early world,

[1] A. B. Davidson.

dashed indeed with occasional sounds and scents of a later age, but in the main the fresh air of a patriarchal life, of the land of the fathers and chieftains of the "Sons of the East." The men with whom we are brought into contact are the sons of a race with a civilization and culture and conquests of its own, but still familiar with the eagle and rock-goat, the lion, the primeval ox and the wild ass; treading the illimitable plains of Asia, with the dew of the morning still upon its forehead, and the curtain yet unraised upon the long centuries that form what we call history.

Uz has not, indeed, been geographically identified, but the rolling table-lands of Southern Syria and Northern Arabia seem to correspond well with all the circumstances and local colouring of the story. The poet selects his stage with inimitable art. The problems with which he has to deal are the largest and most profound that can engage the human mind. These, and these only, must be grappled with; there must be no evasions, no side issues, no irrelevant complications. It is to be an era-making battle, and the decks must be completely cleared for action. Not amid the dust and din of busy life, not amid the teeming throngs, is the poet's eye and the thinker's mind clearest to see and to know the vision of God and the mystery of man; not amid the rude contacts and the deafening dissonance of contest and struggle can the poet's ear distinguish and drink in the eternal harmonies; not from the low level of his narrow glen, hemmed in by an environment of national prejudice and the dogmas of his time, can the seer discern and measure the possibilities, proportions, and actualities of men and things. He must to yonder mountain-top amid the silent stars, to yon vast wilderness in spirit hie, and there in pensive loneliness, girded by infinity, propound for solution the dark riddles of existence, and seek for answers out of the deep where dwelleth the Divine.

¶ There is a suggestion which I wish to make, with such diffidence and tentativeness as is necessary for one who is not a Hebrew scholar, that the greater part of the Book of Job, that is to say, the whole of the dramatic argument between Job and his three friends and Elihu, is a conscious attempt by a Jewish author to represent the highest *Gentile* thought with which he was acquainted on the problem of suffering; and that the utterance of Jehovah represents the addition which he feels that Jewish revelation can make to what we should call the truths of natural

religion. There is much that supports such a view: the scene of the drama is at once placed in a Gentile country: "there was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job"; he is "the greatest of all the children of the East"; the Gentile origin of each of the friends is stated: one is a Temanite, another a Shuhite, the third a Naamathite, while the fourth speaker is a Buzite. They quote no revelation of God; Bildad appeals to the wisdom of former generations, and Eliphaz claims that this is a native wisdom untouched by the influence of strangers, "which wise men have told from their fathers, and have not hid it; unto whom alone the land was given, and no stranger passed among them"; the standard of Job's righteousness is the same as that which our Lord adopts when He passes judgment on the heathen world in the parable of the Sheep and the Goats: the allusions to the magicians who draw out Leviathan, to the great monsters of the Nile, to the papyrus and to the skiffs made from the papyrus, the possible references to the pyramids and the phœnix point in the same direction, and the two great lines of argument which are mainly insisted on—that suffering springs from sin, and that it has an educative value—only expand those truths which were enshrined in the terse epigrams of Æschylus and of Solon, παθεῖν τὸν ἔρξαντα and τὰ δέ μοι παθήματα . . . μαθήματα γεγόνεε (Æsch. *Agam.*, 1564; Herod. i. 207).

Then to crown and to go beyond this Gentile feeling after God there comes the utterance of Jehovah Himself, the addition of Judaism. What is the substance of this? may we not say that it is the application to the problem of suffering of the great revelation of the first three chapters of the Book of Genesis? It is not merely an appeal to the omnipotence of God—that argument which the prophets and even St. Paul use at times with such sledge-hammer force to limit the freedom of man and to represent him as nothing more than clay in the potter's hand; it is partly that, and that is very Jewish; but it is more than that. It is not, again, simply an appeal to the beauty and strength of Nature; it is that, too; it is full of the thought that God saw all that He had made and that it was very good. But there is also the suggestion that these are the work of the same God who had created man himself; and there is also the suggestion that all this beauty of the world was made to be subservient to man: the writer knew (for he had already in vii. 17 described Job as parodying) the eighth Psalm; and the thought of that Psalm, that man is greater than all creatures, is implicit here. "Look at My power" (this is the argument), "look at the beauty of all that has come from My hand; then you will feel your own powerlessness

before the Creator, but you will also be willing to believe that He is producing out of your own human life with all its present sufferings a result which will have upon it in the end the stamp of Divine beauty: wait and trust: a Creator will prove a Redeemer." It is very closely akin to the way in which the voice of Nature and its kinship with the still sad music of humanity, drew Wordsworth from despondency into faith; it is the thought which has been expressed with all his beautiful simplicity by my Dorset poet:

> An' many times when I do vind
> Things all goo wrong, an' vo'k unkind,
> To zee the happy veeden herds,
> An' hear the zingen of the birds,
> Do soothe my sorrow mwore than words:
> Vor I do zee that 'tis our sin
> Do meäke woone's soul so dark 'ithin,
> When God would gie woone zunsheen.[1]

III.

Its Purpose.

What is the purpose of the book? This question has been answered in so many ways that a judgment regarding it must be put forth with the greatest diffidence. Almost every theory that has been adopted has found itself in collision with one or more of the parts of which the book now consists, and has been able to maintain itself only by sacrificing these parts upon its altar.

1. In the Book of Job nothing less than a campaign of centuries is dramatically compressed into a single decisive battle. The Israelites of the pre-Exilic time, mastered by a mighty monotheism that had not yet reached the stage of enlightenment at which the origin and existence of evil become an urgent speculative problem, have a facile explanation of all sufferings. To them, as their Scriptures mirror their minds to us, there is no mystery of pain. God being all in all, and every event, morally or materially hurtful as well as beneficial, being traced to His immediate action, He rules the affairs of men with a justice so rigid and

[1] W. Lock, in *The Interpreter*, ii. (1906) 353.

exact that it is always well with the righteous and ill with the wicked. The Divine government accomplishes that which the best human government can only attempt—it rewards the deserving and punishes the guilty. The causal nexus between goodness and prosperity, sin and suffering, is never broken. Health, wealth, peace, comfort, long life are the lot of the true servants of God; sickness, poverty, trouble, disaster, early death are the portion of the wicked. One's outward condition is always tell-tale, success being the indication of God's favour, failure of His anger. Accident and partiality are alike unknown. Famine, earthquake, pestilence, defeat in war, are the punishment of sin; abundance of corn, wine, and oil, a peaceful home, and a numerous progeny, the reward of righteousness. In the field of destiny, which is this earth, men reap what they have sown. No light of immortality has yet been shed upon human lives; there is no judgment in Sheol, where all things are alike to all. The present life, rounded and complete in itself, alone counts for anything, and between the cradle and the grave men receive what they merit. A man's life and his lot in life *must* correspond, otherwise God would be unjust.

2. This theory, as the author of the book sees clearly enough, is fraught with difficulties. The problem of the mystery of pain and suffering weighed heavily upon his mind, and through the medium of the old patriarchal story he would set his thoughts upon it before his contemporaries. He himself has no complete and consistent theory to put in the place of the old one which he demolishes, but one thing he can see clearly enough, viz., that you have no right to argue back from suffering to sin, and this he is determined to make others see as well. Further, there are various considerations, each of which requires to be taken into account, which he brings forward in the several portions of the poem. It is in the second and longest section that the workings of his mind are most fully revealed, and in this the main interest of the book is centred. It must be remembered that the parties to the debate knew nothing whatever of the scene in heaven as described in the Prologue. The author of the book by placing this in the forefront has admitted us behind the scenes, and let us into the secret of Job's sufferings. They formed, as so many

sufferings form to-day, a God-permitted Satanic temptation, allowed in order to test the patriarch's faith, and try whether his goodness was genuine, or whether his piety was after all a subtle form of selfishness, a serving God for what he could get out of Him. But of this neither Job himself nor the friends were aware. They only knew what they could see with the eye of sense. Here was a man who had lived in great prosperity, honoured and respected of all men, suddenly overwhelmed with calamity after calamity—his flocks and his herds destroyed, his children dead, himself a victim of a most loathsome disease. What did it all mean? That was the problem before them.

3. If we bring the Prologue and the Debate into combination we perceive that it was the author's purpose to widen men's views of God's providence, and to set before them a new view of suffering. With great skill he employs Job as his instrument to clear the ground of the old theories, and he himself brings forward in their place his new truth, that suffering may befall the innocent, and be not a chastisement for their sins but a trial of their righteousness.

But the Book of Job was more than a commentary on popular theories of providence: it had a practical aim as well. If we fix the date of its composition in the period which saw the destruction of Jerusalem and the deportation of the flower of the population to Babylon, we may hold that it was addressed to that section of the people who in a corrupt age remained faithful to Jehovah. The Remnant, as they are called by the prophets, must have had a history full of suffering and full of perplexity. Their courage and confidence were sorely tried. The author hoped that the example of Job would appeal to his contemporaries. It was an example of disinterested righteousness, to emulate which was perhaps the only ambition left to them. It was that he might inspire them with strength sufficient for the terrible strain to which they also were being subjected that he told them the story of the patriarch's vast patience and indomitable faith.

¶ The secret of Adèle Kamm's abiding and triumphant joy lay in the fact that it was constantly renewed in the hidden depths of the unfailing fountains of pain. In the crucible of Christian faith her sorrow was turned into a wonderful joy. Her

faith was of an essentially living and individual type. She owed very little to human teaching. She grew up in her own way, educated in the severe but wholesome school of suffering. If we may mention any one book which, read at the right moment, brought heavenly light to her soul, we do so knowing that it had this effect on her simply because she found in it the reflection of her own personality; and because it gave her intense joy to find her own thoughts set forth with absolute clearness, thoughts which up till that moment had been confused, vague, and semi-articulate. Such was her experience on reading the book entitled *Studies on the Value of Suffering* [by Ernest Rostan].

"You cannot imagine," she wrote to Mr. M., "my feelings of profound surprise and satisfaction when, on opening the unknown book which you had so kindly lent me, I discovered that I was reading an exact interpretation of all my thoughts, whether clearly defined or only half conscious (even to myself), and indeed the expression of my deepest feelings. For those who have not suffered much the chapter on 'Expiation through Suffering' may well seem very mysterious and almost unreal. That is why, until now, I have always taken care to hide the secret of my joy in suffering in the deepest recesses of my soul. Faith and the love of God in Christ can give the only consolation to those in affliction, but I believe the source of abiding joy in constant suffering, lies in a somewhat vague, confused, but real sense of vicarious sacrifice. Even when this feeling becomes more definite, we cannot go to our neighbour and say, 'I am in a state of heavenly bliss unknown to the majority of men and women, because I know that I am suffering a direct chastisement inflicted by God, not only for my own sins but also for the sins of the whole world, for that burden of guilt which would overwhelm us altogether were it not for the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and that of the members of His Church.' This holy joy would be misunderstood, criticism would soon extinguish the sacred flame which burns in the depths of the soul, and I have never mentioned the subject to any one."

The reason why Adèle Kamm could enter into such full sympathy with Mr. Rostan was that he too was a comrade in suffering. He had trodden the same path and had reached the same goal. He bases his whole argument upon the words of St. Paul: "I . . . fill up on my part that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body's sake, which is the Church," the word "Church" being taken in its broadest sense and covering the whole of regenerate humanity.[1]

[1] *A Living Witness: The Life of Adèle Kamm* (1914), 180, 185.

¶ Suffering may be desired, not as the reward of a kind of self-interested devotion, but as a condition in which we are brought nearer to the attainment of an object which is, in itself, worth all the sacrifices of which man is capable. When the saint rises to fresh heights he realizes that all great things are in reality accomplished by God through the medium of man, and therefore, as far as he himself is concerned, he desires suffering solely as a means of destroying self-love and everything that tends to separate him from the object of his love.[1]

When this world's pleasures for my soul sufficed,
  Ere my heart's plummet sounded depths of pain,
  I called on reason to control my brain,
And scoffed at that old story of the Christ.

But when o'er burning wastes my feet had trod,
  And all my life was desolate with loss,
  With bleeding hands I clung about the cross,
And cried aloud, "Man needs a suffering God!"[2]

IV.

Its Plan.

The writer of the Book of Job is a born dramatist. It is of the essence of his active mind to recognize and state all the arguments which make for and against the conclusion which he himself has reached; and he finds a rudimentary form of dramatic art the fittest medium for a full and adequate discussion of the burning question of his age. Out of the rich store of the nation's legends he chooses the case of a blameless, upright, God-fearing sheikh, the greatest of the sons of the East, who was suddenly cast from the height of prosperity to the lowest depth of misery. Stripped of his wealth, bereft of his family, struck down with a loathsome disease, doomed to an early and painful death, regarded as a common criminal by those near and dear to him, this man presents an absolute contradiction to the ideal union of moral rectitude and worldly happiness. By means of a daring prologue in Heaven, the poet claims the Divine sanction

[1] Henri Joly, *The Psychology of the Saints.*
[2] Ella Wheeler Wilcox, *Poems of Life*, 13.

for his own view that the suffering of the righteous man is not the punishment of sin but the trial of faith. Job himself, though ignorant of this aspect of the case, at first bears his unparalleled misfortunes with exemplary patience; but, having been educated in the old faith, and necessarily regarding the calamities which have overtaken him as signs of God's anger, he is gradually forced to the agonizing conclusion that God is unjust.

Job's doubts exhibit themselves by stages. (1) In the first instance he has none. His attitude under his several crushing calamities was, like the whole of his early course, "perfect," exhibiting a marvellous degree of submission to God's providence. He "sinned not, nor charged God with foolishness." Having received much good at the hands of God, he was content to receive evil; though it is to be observed that his resignation, as expressed in chap. ii. 10, is not quite as complete as that in chap. i. 20–22. During many days and nights after this he was silent, his silence expressing a negative but real submission even in the extremity of his grief. (2) Even when he opened his mouth with the bitter cry of chap. iii., he expressed no religious doubt or denial. He "cursed his day," not God. The third chapter is one long moan. It is a very terrible cry of human despair, but it is not so far a complaint, still less an indictment of Divine justice. (3) This feature of Job's utterances appears only after Eliphaz has applied to his smarting sores the sharp blister of an insinuation that his calamities spring from unfaithfulness to God. This is too much for him. He begins to admit more distinctly that his sufferings are from God (vi. 4), and yet he knows that he has "not denied the words of the Holy One" (vi. 10). After this he allows all the bitterness of his soul to stream forth. Sometimes he scornfully repudiates the milder insinuations or downright reproaches of his friends. Sometimes he appeals indignantly to God, who knows his uprightness of heart and integrity of life. Sometimes he remonstrates with the Most High, or complains that direct remonstrance is impossible, for if he "knew where he might find him, he would fill his mouth with arguments." (4) At a later stage he replies more calmly, so far as the friends are concerned. His confidence that there is a Supreme Tribunal, before which even this high cause may be argued, grows and deepens. He casts about for some as yet unrevealed solution, and at the end of chap.

xix. appears disposed to rest in a sublime, unquenchable hope. (5) Yet again, this fails him. In the course of chap. xxviii. he appears to be saying to himself—for the friends are beyond the reach of argument—that wisdom in these matters is for God alone, man's wisdom being to give himself to the duties of practical religion, since these alone are within his reach. The long monologue with which Job closes exhibits him in a comparatively calm but altogether unsatisfied state of mind, for not in pensive reminiscences, or in a reassertion of his righteousness, or in a vain cry "Oh, that I had one to hear me!" is peace to be found. But before we come to the statement that "the words of Job are ended," almost every mood of doubt and appeal and denial has been passed through, and has been so fully represented that we may say each has received sympathetic recognition in this remarkable book. And that that should be so is the first proof—no small one—of the value of the Book of Job in our sacred literature.

But let us take the book in order. As it now lies before us, it consists of five parts—the Prologue, the Debate, the Intervention of Elihu, the Answer of the Almighty, and the Epilogue.

1. *The Prologue.*—The Prologue acquaints us with the person and character of Job, and the occasion of the calamities which befell him. Job is a man "perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil," a non-Israelite, who lived in Uz. He is depicted as a prosperous Arab sheikh, rich in cattle and other possessions, and displaying a tender solicitude for the welfare of his family. But the scene changes; aud we are transported by the poet from the plains of Uz to the halls of Heaven, where, like an Oriental Sovereign, the Almighty holds His court. The "sons of God," *i.e.*, the angels, come from time to time to report themselves to their Sovereign; upon the occasion pictured by the poet, one called "the Satan," *i.e.*, "the Opposer," the angel whose part it is to oppose men's claims to righteousness before God, and who takes a cynical delight in detecting flaws in their character, presents himself among them. Upon his attention being directed by the Almighty to His righteous servant, Job, the Satan is ready with his reply, *Doth Job serve God for nought?* His righteousness, he insinuates, is not disinterested; he is

sufficiently rewarded for it by the blessings lavished upon him by God; if these were withdrawn, he would disown God to His face. The Satan thereupon receives permission to test Job's piety as severely as may be, without touching his person; and one after another his cattle are raided, his sheep struck by lightning, his servants slain, and his children killed by the house in which they are feasting being suddenly blown down. But Job's piety stands the trial; he is deeply affected, but receives his misfortunes with resignation:

"Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither:
The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

A second time the celestial court is held, and again the Satan is present. Dissatisfied with the test which has been already applied to Job, he receives permission to try the patriarch again. Forthwith Job is smitten from head to foot with sore boils, probably the severe and distressing form of leprosy called elephantiasis. In spite of the pitiable condition to which he is reduced, he still utters no complaint; when his wife counsels him to "renounce God and die," he repels her advice with some emphasis, exclaiming, "What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?"

Two important points are thus far established by the Prologue, viz., that there may be such a thing as undeserved misfortune, and also such a thing as disinterested goodness. We, of course, doubt neither of these things now; but the first, at all events, was doubted by many when the poem of Job was written.

2. *The Debate.*—While the Prologue is written in prose, the Debate between Job and his friends (chaps. iv.–xxxi.) is written in poetry. This comprises a series of speeches in which the problem of Job's afflictions, and the relation of external evil to the righteousness of God and the conduct of men, are brilliantly discussed. The theory of the friends is that affliction implies previous sin on the part of the sufferer, though in the case of a good man such as Job it is chastisement meant to wean him from evil still cleaving to him; and they exhort him to repentance, and

hold up a bright future before him. Job denies that his sufferings are due to sin, of which he is innocent; God wrongly holds him guilty and afflicts him. And, taught by his own history, he is led to look more narrowly at the course of providence in the world, and he fails to perceive that inseparable connexion in every instance between sin and suffering which the three friends insisted on; the providence of God is not in fact administered on such a principle.

The discussion between Job and his friends consists of three circles of speeches: (1) chaps. iv.–xiv.; (2) chaps. xv.–xxi.; and (3) chaps. xxii.–xxxi. Each of these three circles comprises six speeches, one from each of the three friends in succession, with a reply from Job. In the last round, however, Zophar, the third speaker, fails to come forward. This is a confession of defeat; and Job, left victor in the strife, resumes his "parable," and carries it through a series of chapters, in which, with profound pathos, he contrasts his former greatness with his present humiliation, protests before Heaven his innocence of all the offences that have been insinuated or may be suggested against him, and adjures God to reveal to him the cause of his afflictions.

3. *The Intervention of Elihu.*—After Job's appeal to God, at the end of chap. xxxi., it might be thought that the crisis of the poem was at hand, and that God must appear to pronounce His verdict upon the discussion. Instead of this, however, Elihu, a speaker who has not been named or alluded to before, steps forward, and expresses his judgment upon the matter in dispute. Elihu is represented as a bystander who has listened to the debate with some dissatisfaction at the line taken in it by both parties; being younger, however, than the other disputants, he has waited until now before venturing to take part in it. In spite, however, of the seeming modesty of his opening words, Elihu in the sequel displays considerable self-consciousness, and speaks in terms which show that he has no small idea of the value of the "wisdom" which he is able to utter.

In what he says, chap. xxxii. is introductory; in chaps. xxxiii., xxxiv., xxxv. he replies to three of Job's main contentions, viz., that God is his enemy and does not answer his cries, that He afflicts him unjustly, and that righteousness is of no profit to a

man; in chaps. xxxvi., xxxvii., which contain his positive contribution to the solution of the problem, he insists firstly upon the disciplinary value of suffering (xxxvi. 8–21), and secondly upon the greatness of God, which renders Him incapable of all pettiness or arbitrary injustice (xxxvi. 26–xxxvii. 24).

Elihu's views in regard to suffering were not so far-reaching as those of the author of the poem. Elihu saw that affliction was disciplinary rather than retributive. But he erroneously conceived the purpose of this discipline as always one and the same, viz., to make men conscious of their sins. He did not perceive that there were other lessons which suffering might teach, and other purposes which it might subserve. Job was not suffering on account of his sins, since "for righteousness there was not his like in all the earth." He was suffering, the poet tells us, to prove, in opposition to "the Adversary" and all other cynics, the possibility of an unselfish goodness. This suggestion, so skilfully introduced into the Prologue, Elihu altogether missed.

In regard to prayer, however, Elihu's teaching is really fresh and valuable. Prayer is too often, as he says, but an instinctive cry for deliverance from pain, whereas it should be rather a request for enlightenment and for spiritual help. If God be a loving God, there must be a wise and beneficent purpose underlying all calamity. As Elihu finely puts it, God delivers the afflicted *by* their afflictions. And so our prayer, when we are in suffering, should be, not so much that this suffering may be removed as that we may be enabled to learn from it the lesson it was intended to teach, and to derive from it the benefit it was meant to confer. There is much need that we all lay to heart Elihu's counsel. If we examine ourselves, we shall find that our prayers are most fervent and most real when we are merely asking for some temporal blessing. Our requests for spiritual enlightenment and help are comparatively languid and forced. We are too anxious to inform the Almighty of our wishes and to bend Him to our will. But to pray in this fashion is to prostitute our noblest endowment. We should be chiefly concerned to understand the Divine will more perfectly, and to be strengthened that we may obey. The main burden of all true prayer is contained in the pregnant summary of Elihu, "That which I see not,

teach thou me; if I have done iniquity, I will do it no more." Well will it be for us if we can say, with all the fervour of which our nature is capable:

I do not ask, O Lord, that life may be
A pleasant road;
I do not ask that Thou wouldst take from me
Aught of its load:

I do not ask that flowers should always spring
Beneath my feet;
I know too well the poison and the sting
Of things too sweet.

For one thing only, Lord, dear Lord, I plead:
Lead me aright—
Though strength should falter and though heart should bleed,
Through Peace to Light.

4. *The Answer of the Almighty.*—In the original poem, we may take it for granted, Job's soliloquy, which finished in chapter xxxi., was immediately followed by Jehovah's speech, which begins in chapter xxxviii. For it is almost certain that the Elihu speeches are not part of the original poem of Job, but the addition of a later writer, who wished to emphasize certain considerations to which he thought sufficient weight had not been attached by the other speakers.

So soon as Job is prepared to hear, God speaks; the revelation comes at the right moment. The man has learned through the things he has suffered. His faith in the ancient theory is dead; he has ceased to judge God according to it. A dim hope has been growing within him into a fixed conviction. This little and troubled life lies in the bosom of eternity, and God acts as one who has eternity before Him, afflicts the righteous mortal that He may redeem him to a more glorious immortality. Is this conviction justified? The more the inequalities, the misjudgments of life, the relations of good and evil in time are looked at, the more necessary does it seem to faith; without it how can belief in the righteousness of the Eternal live? And so with a humbler spirit, and out of deeper necessities, Job cries, "Oh that I had one to hear me! Behold, here is my signature, let the Almighty

answer me!" And the Almighty does answer him; Jehovah speaks out of the whirlwind.

Here everything is significant; the speeches are a wonderland of poetry and truth. The whirlwind declares the majesty of the Speaker, the might and multitude of the forces He has to control. Job at the outset is lifted to an altitude higher than he had yet dreamed of; his problem is not to be solved in and through himself, even with immortality assured; the universe enters into it. God cannot reign as if the one Sovereign had but one subject; He must deal with the individual as part of a complex whole, yet of a whole that can be governed in wisdom only as the individuals are justly and graciously handled. This is the point which the opening of the speeches emphasizes. Job has interrogated God; God will now interrogate Job. "Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?" The calamities that so perplex, the sufferings that have worked so many sorrows, are not accidents; there is a Divine purpose in them. What is confusion to Job is order to God; counsel is in it and wisdom too vast to be comprehended, but true enough to be trusted. For what is the range of man's vision compared with God's? "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding." Then the story of creation and providence is told with a stateliness and a splendour of imagery that have never been paralleled. Everywhere God acts, every moment He is active. And as the sphere of the Divine action is thus made to open into infinity, the Speaker suddenly pauses to ask, "Shall he that cavilleth contend with the Almighty? he that argueth with God, let him answer it." And Job replies, "Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer thee? I lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken, and I will not answer (again); yea twice, but I will proceed no further."

In the second speech even a higher strain is reached. Job is to "gird up his loins like a man." Is he to condemn God that he himself may be righteous? But only a God could judge God, Divine wisdom alone could comprehend and appraise the wisdom of the Divine. Then with a most daring yet magnificent stroke of imagination the poet says: Become in thought God; "deck thyself now with excellency and dignity, and array thyself with honour and majesty." So clothed, use all thy energies to abase

the proud and bring the evil to the dust. In that endeavour God will praise thee, for He knows what it is to be God; yet one who knows only what it is to be man judges Him who is God alone! The speech then breaks into a marvellous description of the mighty creatures of the Nile, chiefest of the works of God, the contemplation of which completes the instruction, humbling the sufferer into resignation, yet raising him to a more perfect faith. He confesses: "I have uttered that which I understood not, things too wonderful for me, which I knew not." He had judged wrongly because he had judged in ignorance. The traditional theory had blinded him; he had been unable to see God for the doctrines of men. "I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear," and so had misjudged; "but now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

5. *The Epilogue.*—The Epilogue may appear to present an anti-climax. It may seem a descent from a lofty spiritual height to a very mundane level, to read after this of Job's having twice as much as he had before, all his relatives and friends gathering about him, that "every man also gave him a piece of money, and every one a ring of gold." If Job really thought that this was the deepest solution of the problem, he had been taught his lesson in vain. But the explanation is very simple. Under the conditions of the time, this was the only way in which to indicate Job's complete justification. The writer could not say, "And Job died, and he was carried away by the angels into Abraham's bosom." The Epilogue does but fulfil the conditions of what we call "poetic justice," and reinstates Job in the position of which he had been deprived for high ends which were beyond his ken. Job's subsequent prosperity is the translation into the concrete of the Divine judgment that "the Lord accepted Job." Perhaps, too, as has been suggested, Job was now able for the first time to use material prosperity, enjoyment, comfort, and "happiness" in the only way in which they are really healthy for man.

¶ Prosperity, enjoyment, happiness, comfort, peace, whatever be the name by which we designate that state in which life is to our own selves pleasant and delightful, as long as they are sought or prized as things essential, so far have a tendency to disennoble

our nature, and are a sign that we are still in servitude tc selfishness. Only when they lie outside us, as ornaments merely to be worn or laid aside as God pleases—only then may such things be possessed with impunity. Job's heart in early times had clung to them more than he knew, but now he was purged clean, and they were restored because he had ceased to need them.[1]

¶ There is no virtue in being in poverty; nor is there any evil in being in good worldly circumstances. The evil is to think that the command of the things of the world is everything, or the principal thing. Apply yourself with all your might to earning money, *in an honest way*, as the means of procuring the things which sustain and elevate life; but never forget that these things are only the material basis of life; that what is most important to you is to raise yourself in the scale of being; and that what matters most to every individual is not one's external circumstances, but one's inner soul-state. The desire to "get on" is quite laudable, in so far as it means making the most of life. It is of some importance, however, to know that one is "getting on" to something really worth attaining. Put down the selfish desires which blind and dominate, and look fairly and calmly at life. You are here only for a short time; some years hence you will be called to leave this world and all that pertains to it. You will then be just what you have made yourself: the only wealth and poverty that will count will be that which is in yourself. Your only real wealth then will be what you have put into yourself by elevating yourself in the scale of life; and your only enduring satisfaction will be in the good that you have done. As much good as you have put into yourself and into the life of man, so much will stand to your credit and no more. This will be the only investment that will not fail you.[2]

V.

Its Theology.

In order to bring the Book of Job nearer to the modern Western mind, we must not only study it from the point of view of form, but also consider its theological ideas. An improved theodicy implies an improved theology, for the deeper and truer

[1] J. A. Froude, *Short Studies on Great Subjects*, i. 321.
[2] R. H. Hodgson, *Glad Tidings!* 56.

solutions of the apparent anomalies of Providence repose on deeper and truer conceptions of God.

1. The poet was a strict monotheist; his doctrine of God left no room for any rival deity. He understood, indeed, the spell cast on the imagination by the sun in its splendour, or the moon as it moved, radiant and majestic, across the heavens. The old nature, which in earlier ages poured forth in adoration to the glorious rulers of day and night, was not wholly dead within him, but the faint quiver of response was rigorously suppressed. Apart from this we have no reference to idolatry or to heathen deities. We are reminded of the Second Isaiah as we read the descriptions of God's greatness and wisdom, His power as displayed in nature and in history. Yet they are not in Job part of a sustained polemic against heathenism, but are designed to convince man of his insignificance before God and his incompetence to pass judgment on His ways. Monotheism is so completely the poet's settled belief, that it is everywhere taken for granted and represented as the unquestioned creed of the non-Israelite speakers.

2. The most clearly recognized attribute of God, however, is His power. Job was fascinated by the tremendousness of God's power. As Dr. Davidson says, "the invincible might of his adversary charms his eye, and compels him to gaze and shudder and run over it feature after feature, unable to withdraw his look from it." In chap. ix., for instance, "this dark incomprehensible Being," wise in heart, mighty in strength, overturning mountains, eclipsing the sun, causing the hills to shrink away from him, and the earth to shiver with dread, so entrances Job's gaze, that every other attribute, except power and wisdom, is obliterated from his mind. Job recalls the famous Oriental mythus which conceived of heaven and earth as once being under the dominion of Disorder, personified as "the Dragon" and "Rahab"; and the God of order "hewed Rahab in pieces, and pierced the dragon," compelled him to allow the sun to shine for half the day, and the waters to withdraw from half the land. And when the dragon in the sea endeavours to bring the waters over the boundary-line, or the serpent in the sky endeavours to coil himself round the sun and obscure it again, the God of order frustrates his purpose by

His superior power. Job's thoughts run on Leviathan and Rahab. He conceives of God as the one under whom "the helpers of Rahab do stoop," and he asks: "Am I a sea, or a dragon, that thou settest a watch over *me*?" And he begs those who know how to rouse Leviathan to cause the monster to obscure the sun on every birthday of his.

3. And what is the effect on Job's mind of this concentrated contemplation of power?

(1) *He fancies that God is utterly merciless.*—"Thou scarest me with dreams, and terrifiest me through visions." "I am made to possess months of vanity, and wearisome nights are appointed to me." "How long wilt thou not look away from me, nor let me alone till I swallow down my spittle?" "He breaketh me with a tempest, and multiplieth my wounds without cause." "He will not suffer me to take my breath, but filleth me with bitterness."

(2) The God of Job's morbid imagination is not only unmoved by pity and mercy, but also *unmoved by ethical considerations.*—He is devoid not only of pity, but also of all moral feeling. Job feels that it is of no use to *plead* with God, to expostulate with Him, or to reply to Him. The terribleness of God makes him afraid. The overmastering supremacy of a God whose only attributes are, in his regard, power and cleverness awes and crushes him.

(3) Another consequence of the despotic conception of God is that *the mere fiat of the Almighty makes right*: that right depends solely on the will of the Deity. This is the creed as to Zeus, which presents itself in the Prometheus. "Zeus," says Owen, "symbolizing lawless power and irresponsible omnipotence, is fittingly represented by his ministers Kratos and Bia, with their appropriate implements of brazen chains, hammers, nails and wedges. The might of Zeus, and that alone, *makes* the right which he ordains." Miss Anna Swanwick reduces the words of Æschylus to English metre, when she represents Prometheus as saying:

> That Zeus is stern, full well I know,
> And by His Might doth measure Right.

Thus the Divine cause of Job's misfortunes has, to his perverted, distorted spiritual vision, taken shape, as a terrible monster, with a malignant eye, which Job cannot elude. He has

morbidly assigned to this Being all the attributes which could cause such disasters as his to one so undeserving as he. The God with whom he used to have such delightful fellowship has gradually changed, so that Job can now say of Him: "Mine adversary sharpeneth his eyes upon me." "He hath gnashed upon me with his teeth." In chap. xvi., Job begins to free himself from the nightmare. This Being, who seems to him so terrible, so malignant, so suspicious, so cruel, cannot be the real, living, and true God. This embodied cause of all his sufferings and wrongs, who oppresses him continually with the crushing sense of His presence, cannot be the real God. Behind this wrathful face and evil eye there must be a God whose aspect is bright and propitious, and whose eye is benignant. "My witness is in heaven," he cries, "and he that voucheth for me is on high." "This was a new and wonderful thought," says Dr. Cox, "that rose like a star on Job's horizon—the thought of 'a just God and a Saviour,' who is often concealed from men by the God they receive from tradition, or infer from Nature or from the tragedies of human life." Job appeals no longer from God to men, or from men to God: *he appeals from the apparent God to the real God*, from the dread Being by whom he fancies himself hostilely persecuted, to the God who "hides himself so wondrously, as if there were no God." The God who was such a delightful reality to Job in the days of his prosperity had not ceased to be. Unseen, unfelt, unrecognizable, veiled behind mystery and tragedy, He somewhere lives on still. He who once heard his prayers and accepted his offerings observes still his tears and agonies and groans. "My witness is in heaven," he cries. He who was once the "Sun of my soul" has veiled Himself in clouds of dense darkness, but He is still there, though at present the only indication of His presence is the deepening of the shadows which envelop me.

¶ Nature, as we know and experience it, presents indeed an appalling spectacle, against which everything that is good in us protests. God, so long as He is but half understood, is utterly unpardonable; and no man yet has succeeded in justifying the ways of God to men. But "to understand all is to forgive all"—or rather, it is to enter into a larger view of life, and to discover how much there is in *us* that needs to be forgiven. This is the wonderful story which was told by the Hebrews so dramatically

in their Book of Job; and the phases through which that drama passes might be taken as the completest commentary on the myth of Prometheus which ever has been or can be written.

Men have struggled in vain, and then protested in bitterness, against the waste and the meaninglessness of the human *débâcle*. The only aspect of the powers above them has seemed to many noble spirits that of the sheer cynic. He that sitteth in the heavens must be laughing indeed. In Prometheus the Greek spirit puts up its daring plea for man. It pleads not for pity merely, but for the worth of human nature. The strong gods cannot be justified in oppressing man upon the plea that might is right, and that they may do what they please. The protest of Prometheus, echoed by Browning's protest of Ixion, appeals to the conscience of the world as right; and, kindling a noble Titanism, puts the Divine oppressor in the wrong. Finally, there dawns over the edge of the ominous dark the same hope that Prometheus vaguely hinted to the Greek. To him who has understood the story of Calvary, the ultimate interpretation of all human suffering is Divine love. That which the cross of Prometheus in all its outrageous cruelty yet hints as in a whisper, the Cross of Christ proclaims to the end of time, shouting down the centuries from its blood and pain that God is love, and that in all our affliction He is afflicted.[1]

[1] J. Kelman, *Among Famous Books*, 19.

JOB.

III.

The Characters.

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The Characters in Job.

And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, when a land sinneth against me by committing a trespass, and I stretch out mine hand upon it, and break the staff of the bread thereof, and send famine upon it, and cut off from it man and beast; though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord God.—Ezek. xiv. 12-14.

Nowhere in the whole course of human literature, sacred or profane, do we find the inexorable problems of life's painful riddles more keenly realized, more urgently pressed home, more freshly pictured than in the Book of Job. Nor is this all. At every page that we turn, from the first to the last, we feel that if we are transported to another age, other manners, and a far-off land, we are still among our kindred and our brothers. The men who speak to us are men with the same joys, the same affections, the same difficulties, the same failings; they are children of the same God, exposed to the same temptations, vexed by the same doubts, the same fears, and upheld, if not by the same hopes, yet by much at least of the same faith and the same guidance. The book is a gift, not to one age or to one race, but to mankind.

1. The book cannot be the record of an actual history. This appears partly from the symbolical numbers, three, five, and seven, used to describe Job's flocks and children, and from the fact that after his restoration the latter are exactly the same in number as before, while the former are exactly doubled; partly from the ideal and dramatic character of his misfortunes, nature and man alternating in their endeavour to ruin him, and one only escaping each time to bring the tidings; but especially from the character of the dialogue, which contains far too much thought and argument to have been extemporized on the occasion, and is manifestly the studied product of the author's leisurely reflection.

¶ Among the Jews in early times the book appears to have been considered strictly historical. This was probably the opinion of Josephus, who, though he does not quote Job in any of his works, appears to embrace it among the thirteen prophetical books forming one division of his Canon. The same was the generally received opinion among the Rabbinical writers. There were exceptions, however, even anterior to the age of the Talmud. A certain Rabbi Resh Lakish sitting in the school before Samuel bar Nachmani gave expression to the opinion that "a Job existed not, and was not created; he is a parable." To this Bar Nachmani replied, "Saith not the scripture, There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job?" Resh Lakish answered, "But how is it then with that place 2 Sam. xii. 3, The poor man had nothing, save one little ewe-lamb which he had bought, etc.? What is that but a common similitude? and so Job is a simple parable." Bar Nachmani could but reply that not only the name of Job but that of his country was mentioned, an answer that probably did not go far to convince his opponent. Resh Lakish was most likely not alone in his opinion, though his view appears to have given scandal to others.[1]

¶ The prevailing opinion among the Jews doubtless continued to be that the Book of Job was strictly historical, and Christian scholars (with the exception of Theodore) found no reason to question this till Luther arose, with his genial, though unscientific, insistence on the right of questioning tradition. In his *Tischreden* Luther says, "Ich halte das Buch Hiob für eine wahre Historia; dass aber alles so sollte geschehen und gehandelt sein, glaube ich nicht, sondern ich halte, dass ein feiner, frommer, gelehrter Mann habe es in solche Ordnung bracht." Poetically treated history—that is Luther's idea, as it was that of Grotius after him, and in our own country of that morning-star of Biblical criticism, Bishop Lowth. It is acquiesced in by Schlottmann, Delitzsch, and Davidson, and with justice, provided it be clearly understood that no positive opinion can reasonably be held as to the historical origin of the tradition used by the author. I have said nothing of Spinoza and Albert Schultens. The former pronounces most unfavourably on the religious and poetical value of the book, which he regards as a heathenish fiction, reminding us somewhat of the hasty and ill-advised Theodore of Mopsuestia. The latter actually defends the historical character both of the narratives and of the colloquies of Job in the strictest sense. Hengstenberg, alone perhaps among orthodox theologians, takes a precisely opposite view. Like Reuss and Merx, he regards the poem as entirely

[1] A. B. Davidson, *The Book of Job*, p. xiii.

a work of imagination. We may be thankful for his protest against applying a prosaic standard to the poetical books of the Hebrew Canon. Those who do so, he remarks, "fail to observe that the book stands, not among historical but among poetical books, and that it would betray a very low grade of culture, were one to depreciate imaginative as compared with historical writing, and declare it to be unsuitable for sacred Scripture." I entirely agree with the eminent scholar, whose unprogressive theology could not entirely extinguish his literary and philological sense.[1]

2. But did Job really live? This is widely different from the question whether Job actually said and did all that is related of him in our book. Once, and once only, is there any mention of Job in the Old Testament outside of the book which bears his name. This solitary reference is made by Ezekiel. The prophet insists on God's severe judgment of idolatry. It brings, he says, inevitable ruin on a land; exceptional cases of individual righteousness are powerless to avert the inevitable doom. Even if Noah, Daniel, and Job were in the devoted land they would not avert its destruction; they would "deliver but their own souls by their righteousness," not the souls of others.

The passage does not, of course, prove that Ezekiel knew the Book of Job as we have it, and there are good reasons for the belief that our Book of Job is somewhat later than the prophet's time. Ezekiel's words do, however, clearly imply that Job was a familiar figure in Hebrew tradition; otherwise the reference would be pointless. Moreover, we may infer from the passage before us, with some degree of probability, that the contemporaries of Ezekiel were acquainted with the story of Job as given in the Prologue and the Epilogue of the book. For the order of the three names in Ezekiel seems to be chosen for the sake of climax rather than for reasons of chronology. Job, like Noah and Daniel, was a great example of righteousness. But whereas Noah saved his whole family and Daniel his three friends, Job lost his children and saved only himself. It is also probable from the collocation with Noah that Job was a saint of primitive antiquity, while for the same reason it is at least possible that Ezekiel did not regard him as a Hebrew.

[1] T. K. Cheyne, *Job and Solomon*, 61.

3. But we are not called upon to limit our thinking to one individual sufferer. Much rather, and with very much more profit, and better point, are we bidden to look with Plato, and the world's best thinkers, on the truly good man, buffeted by every wind of adverse circumstance, and so exposed to all that keen and dreadful suffering which enters into every worthy or heroic life. In Plato's *Republic* we have the picture of the just man, doing "no injustice, yet having the reputation of doing the greatest, and so tortured for justice, nay, scourged, tormented, fettered, having his eyes burnt out, and lastly, having suffered all manner of evils, crucified. And all this suggests the question of questions, making us wonder, as if the gods gave to many good men misfortunes and a wretched life, and to contrary persons a contrary experience." We do not deal here with that suffering and pain which falls on the bad man who has broken all law, and thus become the victim of his own wrong-doing; what concerns us supremely now is the suffering of the good man, the saint—that man who is the servant of God and of every good cause. Such a one belongs to no one city or place, but is a fellow-citizen of us all.

¶ The Book of Job was never written to satisfy an esoteric few. It came glowing from a large human heart, from the furnace of universal human affliction; and it is adapted to reach every soul that has thought and suffered. The more we penetrate beyond the mere skill of the author to communion in spirit with the man, the more will this universal character, this cry from the heart of humanity, far beyond the jargon of a class or the cunning performance of a pen, impress itself upon us. Time and space are annihilated, and the unreal vagaries of speculation seem outlived, as this echo of our own deep consciousness comes floating to us across the centuries.[1]

I.

Satan.

1. Of the characters in the poem the most deeply contrasted to Job is Satan, the Accuser, at whose instigation the trial of his integrity is made. In studying this character, we need to dismiss

[1] J. F. Genung, *Job*, 5.

from our minds, for the time being, the Satanic traits that come to light in other parts of Scripture, and confine ourselves to the record before us.

It is to be observed that the Satan is here as a member of the heavenly council. The writer has no knowledge of the later view that the Satan was a fallen, and therefore cast out, angel. He is not even the Accuser in such a pronounced form as in Zechariah's prophecy, nor the Tempter, as in the latest of the Canonical writings, the Books of Chronicles. Here he is an executive angel, who finds out fault, and has the power of inflicting suffering, in its many and varied forms.

2. The Satan, then, is that one of God's ministers whose part it is to oppose men in their pretensions to a right standing before God—that is, who represents God's trying, sifting providence. He is one of God's messengers, and presents himself before God to report, or to receive commissions, parts of God's will which he is to execute. God's providence is over all; He doeth whatsoever is done in heaven or on earth. But He makes use of agents in His operations. Hence the same act, such as instigating David to number the people, may in one place be ascribed to God directly, as in 2 Sam. xxiv. 1, and in another to Satan, as in 1 Chron. xxi. 1.

God's purposes are usually beneficent and gracious, hence the angels are comprehensively designated as "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation." But He has also purposes of judgment and chastisement, which are executed by those called the "destroyers." In all these operations, whether of mercy or of judgment, the angels are simply servants. They do God's behests. Their own moral character does not come into question. They are neither good nor bad angels. The spirit from the Lord that troubled Saul is called "evil," not in reference to its own character, but to the effect produced on Saul's mind. In like manner the spirit that came forth and undertook to delude Ahab to his destruction, was not a false spirit in himself, he merely became a lying spirit in the mouth of Ahab's prophets. In all such cases the spirit is characterized according to the influence which he exerts.

3. But although the Satan is not represented here as a fallen or evil spirit, yet undoubtedly a step towards this is taken. He shows an assiduity slightly too keen in the exercise of his somewhat invidious function. He rather usurps the initiative in marking out Job for trial, even though he might feel sheltered under his general commission. The author lets us know that this is his view of him when he puts into God's mouth the words: "Thou movedst me against him." And in the parallel passage (Zech. iii.) his cold-blooded cruelty in the exercise of his office against the miserable, and in a moral sense the somewhat ragged, Church of the Restoration stands rebuked before the spirit of Divine compassion: "The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" Subsequent revelation made advances on the doctrine of Satan, the discussion of which, however, does not concern us now.

¶ The accuser of Job appears to us identical with the accuser of the godly in all ages, the Spirit of Evil that is in the world, not, like the Persian Ormuzd, co-ordinate with, but one ever subordinate to, God, and thus unable to do anything against God's servants without His permission. Meanwhile

> Behind the dim unknown
> Standeth God within the shadow
> Keeping watch above His own.[1]

II.

Job's Friends.

1. Three wealthy friends of Job, who lived far apart from each other, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, heard of Job's disaster, and they made an appointment to visit him and to comfort him. Apparently they had heard of his losses, but did not expect to find him so terribly afflicted. When they saw him, they lifted up their voices and wept, rent their mantles, sprinkled dust on their heads, and sat in silence for seven days—custom requiring that visitors should not be the first to speak. Those seven days were full of busy thoughts.

[1] D. Davies, *The Book of Job*, i. 70.

However ye might err in after speech,
The mute expression of that voiceless woe
Whereby ye sought your sympathy to show
With him of Uz, doth eloquently preach—
Teaching a lesson it were well to teach
Some comforters, of utterance less slow,
Prone to believe that they more promptly know
Grief's mighty depths and by their words can reach.
Seven days and nights, in stillness as profound
As that of chaos, patiently ye sate
By the heartstricken and the desolate:
And though your sympathy might fail to sound
The fathomless depth of his dark spirit's wound,
Not less your silence was sublimely great.[1]

2. Let us understand how the misery of their friend affected them. Here was unparalleled misery experienced by a man of unparalleled piety! They came with the best intentions, wishful to comfort him, and yet their sympathy was chilled by a rigid creed which obliged them to associate suffering and sin. They were bewildered. Their creed had, in the person of Job, received a rude shock. Here was a man whom they had always honoured and revered for his piety, before whose utterances they had "refrained talking and laid their hand on their mouth." They were in a strait betwixt two: should they trust their *faith* or their *friend?* Their creed said: "Suffering implies past sin. Great suffering implies great sin." A pious psalmist of the same school of thought had said: "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I never seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." Until now *they* could have borne the same testimony; but here was a man in abject poverty who had in their esteem stood at the very summit of moral worth. Was it *possible* that he had been a hypocrite? or had God been unfaithful? It never occurred to them that perhaps they had misinterpreted God's method of government. They never for one moment distrusted their creed. It was so simple, and easy of application. "A righteous God doeth righteously!" "A righteous King only punishes men who deserve it." That was all. God is active everywhere; and in all things He does His will. Whatever happens is God's immediate action. He rewards every man, here

[1] Francis Quarles.

and now, according to his deeds. If God be righteous, He must reward the righteous. He cannot righteously afflict good men—for long, at all events. The spectacle of Job's sufferings reduced them to a terrible dilemma: either God is unrighteous or Job is not good.

¶ The writer represents the three friends, not as a weaker person would have represented them, as foolish, obstinate bigots, but as wise, humane, and almost great men, who, at the outset at least, are animated only by the kindest feelings, and speak what they have to say with the most earnest conviction that it is true. Job is vehement, desperate, reckless. His language is the wild, natural outpouring of suffering. The friends, true to the eternal nature of man, are grave, solemn, and indignant, preaching their half truth, and mistaken only in supposing that it is the whole; speaking, as all such persons would speak and still do speak, in defending what they consider sacred truth against the assaults of folly and scepticism.[1]

3. Job cast wistful glances towards his friends. To his horror, he saw the look of pity and kindliness gradually fading away. Their faces darken into inquiry, and inquiry deepens into suspicion. "Can it be that they doubt my integrity?" Job asks himself. "Can it be that they apply to *me* their grim creed? Suspect *me* of being a sinner, a hypocrite?" It is but too true. The faces of the three grow hard. They would rather distrust their friend than distrust their creed. Their creed says, "He must have been a hypocrite, for such suffering implies great sin"; and at the thought of that, friendship begins to fly away. To be doubted by those whom he most loved, to be suspected when he looked for sympathy, is more than Job can endure. His faith reels. When he loses faith in goodness, he loses faith in God. He breaks forth bitterly into cursing, lamentation, and woe.

¶ Few men have had a genius for friendship equal to Professor Edward Freeman's. The names of those he cared for were continually on his lips, and their lives in his thoughts; their misfortunes touched him like his own; he was always ready to defend them, always ready to give any aid they needed. No differences of opinion affected his regard. Sensitive as he was to criticism, he received their censure on any part of his work without offence. The need he felt for knowing how they fared and for sharing his

[1] J. A. Froude, *Short Studies on Great Subjects*, i. 301.

thoughts with them expressed itself in the enormous correspondence, not of business, but of pure affection, which he kept up with his many friends, and which forms, for his letters were so racy that many of them were preserved, the fullest record of his life.[1]

4. But let us look at the three friends separately.

(1) *Eliphaz.*—Eliphaz was probably the oldest of the three, for in the East great respect was paid to age, and he always speaks first. He was decidedly the wisest and the best of them—a more original thinker, a more gentlemanly controversialist, and a more sympathetic, or rather a less unsympathetic, friend. He had something of "the vision and the faculty divine." He had heard voices and talked with spirits from the unseen world; and it is on this experience that he bases his argument.

To Eliphaz the whole duty of man is fear of God and unconditional submission. And what is the worst of all sins? Anger and insurrection against God. And what is the only wisdom? To lay one's cause before God, to allow oneself to be instructed by Him, and not to disdain His chastisement. He who does this will be delivered out of all his distresses, for God is compassionate to the humble. The conception of religion which Eliphaz holds is not that of ancient Israel, for the early religion knew no such slavish submission, no such contempt of the worth of man. This conception transfers to the Lord of all lords that despotic notion of rulership which the Jews learned after the destruction of their independence. It is not without imposing power and influence. It has become the fundamental thought of the Semitic world-religion of Islam, but it oppresses the free motions of the soul, the honourable courage of the clear conscience, the aspiration after elevation of the spiritual personality, and makes man a flatterer of God or a fatalist. The true humility springs up only from the soul of a moral self-consciousness; never was any one more lowly in heart than He who said of Himself, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth."

(2) *Bildad.*—Bildad and Zophar are younger than Eliphaz. Bildad appeals neither to visions nor to his own discoveries; he holds by experience and the teaching of the fathers, for "we

[1] J. Bryce, *Studies in Contemporary Biography*, 290.

are but of yesterday, and know nothing." His homely wisdom instructs Job that the impious man may flourish for a time, but some day he must suddenly perish like a plant without water. So it happened to Job's children, but he himself, since he was not entirely condemned, may yet hope for a complete restoration, in case he is pure and honourable and turns in prayer to God, who does not reject the righteous. This is the doctrine of Divine recompense which was prevalent after Deuteronomy.

What Bildad lacks in dignity he gains in directness. His theory of God's dealings with good and evil men is exactly that of the former speaker; but his strong point is that that theory is proved beyond cavil by the experience and opinions of former generations. He is a choice specimen of the traditional theologian. He lays down the dogmas of orthodoxy with the self-confident air of one who thinks it sufficient to quote a creed to prove a doctrine. The authority of fathers and grandfathers is unimpeachable; their fixed opinions are the rules of truth. Traditional theology is cheap; it costs no sweat of brow or toil of brain. Moreover, its hallowed and hoary platitudes are easy of application. They are like precedents in law, offering a short, easy, and authoritative method of settling causes. Bildad had these precedents ready on his tongue-tip, in troops and battalions. He is a well-known figure in modern theology. His tribe is still extant and numerous. "Doth God pervert justice?" Thy children may have deserved their fate. But, "if thou wert pure and upright; surely now God would awake for thee, and make the habitation of thy righteousness prosperous." "God will not cast away a perfect man, neither will he uphold the evil-doers." No need to dispute plain truths like these. Ask antiquity. Consult the creed.

(3) *Zophar.*—Zophar relies neither upon revelations nor upon experience; he appeals to the light which every sound human understanding has. This light shows us, above all, that human knowledge cannot measure itself with the Divine. Zophar feels that Job, with his penetrating cry, "Wherefore," seeks to influence the Deity in a way that is as foolish as unnatural for him. If man were as omnipresent as God, man could follow Him in His works. God has His reasons in His actions, for He knows every-

thing and perceives even the sins which a man, especially so rebellious a man as Job, does not see.

Zophar is neither a thinker nor a scholar. He is an ignorant and vulgar bigot. He could hardly say when or how his opinions first came into his head; he has never asked himself *why* he believed anything. The fact that his ideas are his own is their all-sufficient justification. A man so pleased with himself is naturally very hard upon others. Accordingly, we find Zophar more cruel in his treatment of Job than either of the other two.

5. It is not their accusations that provoke the anger of Job so much as their vacant platitudes, their superficial maxims, their sorry attempts to solve new problems by obsolete methods, their blind pedantic orthodoxy. Surely, were they not bemused with a theology out of touch with life, they would catch the ring of sincerity in his voice, and brush aside the unworthy thought of secret sin adequate to so terrible a punishment. Their arguments fill him with scorn and irritation, but their unkindness wounds him to the quick. He had counted on their sympathy, but had been disappointed, as caravans perish from thirst, since the streams they had reckoned on are dry. At times he even appeals to their pity: "Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye my friends; for the hand of God hath touched me." But more often he crumples them with his scorn, and renews his contention with God.

¶ Goethe was thwarted alike by external circumstances and by his own temperament, and there came occasions when he was disposed to accept failure as his wisest choice. In two poems of this period he gives expression to this mood. In the one, *Adler und Taube*, a young eagle is wounded by a fowler, but after three days recovers, though with disabled wings. Two doves alight near the spot, and one of them addresses soothing words to the crippled king of the birds. "Thou art in sorrow," he coos; "be of good courage, friend! hast thou not here all that peaceful bliss requires? . . . O friend, true happiness is content, and everywhere content has enough." "O wise one," spoke the eagle, and, moved to deep earnest, sinks more deeply into himself: "O wisdom! thou speakest like a dove."[1]

[1] P. Hume Brown, *The Youth of Goethe*, 183.

III.

Elihu.

Elihu has been very diversely estimated. As Dr. Davidson says, "a great deal of bad language has been discharged at Elihu." He has been called "a bombastic chattering trifler," and "a conceited stripling." Jerome says that he is afflicted with a shallow, scientific dilettantism and faith-opposing philosophy. Others maintain that he only throws new darkness over a subject which was beginning to clarify itself, and that, without an idea of his own, he begins to pillage speeches of all preceding speakers, in order to hide his own hollowness. The Jews identified him with Balaam; and the Testament of Job says that Elihu was imbued with the spirit of Satan. But in recent times a more favourable estimate has been formed of him; and it is now maintained that while the poetry of the Elihu speeches does not reach the same level as that of the Dialogue, yet his discourses certainly "contain no Satanic poison," but rather the germ of ideas which form an essential part of Christian teaching.

Elihu agreed with the friends in connecting all human suffering with sin. He agreed with them further in connecting all suffering with personal sin in the sufferer. He disagreed with them in connecting suffering with the nature's deep sinfulness, not its mere *sins*. And thus, further, he disagreed with them in the view he took of the purpose of suffering; it was not penalty, but chastisement; not the weapon of God's anger, but the instrument for many purposes of His love. With Job he agreed in his estimate of the awful Omnipotence of God, and the ultimate inscrutability of His ways. But he disagreed with him by denying this inscrutability to be absolute; and by denying God to be mere power—He is power with goodness, *God is mighty, but contemns not.* Omnipotence and condescension appear in all His works. This on one side furnishes a clue to the meaning of affliction—it comes not in anger but in love. On the other side the clue is furnished by man's nature; affliction is for sin. There is enough in man's nature to deserve and account for all he suffers; there is enough visible of God in His general providence to demonstrate

that suffering flows from His infinite goodness. To this Job has nothing to answer; his conscience proclaims its concurrence by his silence.

With regard to the final end of Job's sufferings, Elihu was right so far in giving them a reference immediately to the sin of Job's heart, for no doubt they had such a reference—Job was purified and elevated by them; but his view was defective when he saw only this relation. Neither he nor the friends ever rose to the conception of Providence as a great scheme, or of the Universe as a great unity. God's dealings, in their view, with an individual took rise and took end with the individual; far-reaching and subtle influences of one creature on multitudes of his fellow-creatures, of one order of creatures on the fate of another order, they dreamed not of. And thus Elihu does not solve the immediate problem of Job's sorrows; he knows their cause no better than the friends or Job himself. But yet he solves what is mainly the problem of sorrow, he contributes enough to satisfy all sufferers, to silence and compose all complaint under suffering.

¶ As related to the subsequent theophany, the conception of Elihu's character is not without a certain grim humour, apparent especially in the sharply accentuated contrast between his extravagant pretensions at the beginning and his ludicrous abasement at the end.[1]

IV.

The Almighty.

1. It is in his debate with God that the interest of Job's speeches is most intense. He charges God, sometimes in language of tremendous realism, with inflicting his intolerable pains. His are the poisoned arrows that have consumed his strength. It is God who assails him like a giant, and dashes him in pieces; God who cruelly persecutes him, breaks him with a tempest, and dissolves him in the storm. It is God's terrors that dismay him, His presence that troubles him, the horrible dreams which He sends that affright him. So with the Almighty for his enemy,

[1] J. F. Genung, *Job*, 81.

he is driven to bay, and turns on God with the plain speech of the desperate:

"Therefore I will not refrain my mouth;
I will speak in the anguish of my spirit;
I will complain in the bitterness of my soul.

My soul is weary of my life;
I will give free course to my complaint;
I will speak in the bitterness of my soul.
Hold your peace, let me alone, that I may speak,
And let come on me what will."

Yet the poet has wonderfully shown us the clashing currents in Job's breast by the strange incoherence of his language about God. He is torn between the bitter present and the happy memory, between the God who is torturing him and the God of whose goodness he had drunk so deeply in the past. And side by side with all his incisive complaints of God's cruelty, and scorn of His malignant pettiness, side by side even with the firm assertion of His immorality, stand other utterances which recognize His righteousness. He bases the confidence he expresses in one of his less gloomy moments on the conviction that a godless man shall not come before Him. He warns the friends that God will not suffer Himself to be flattered by lies. It is therefore natural that appeal should alternate with invective. The appeal is in some cases, indeed, rather remonstrance. Why had God suffered him to be born? Why does He contend with him, why hide His face? What are the sins God has to bring against him? Is it good for Him to despise His own work, or, when He has lavished so much care on fashioning His servant, wantonly to destroy him? But the tone of remonstrance is softened into the tone of pathetic appeal. Would that he knew where he might find Him, that he might lay bare his case or utter his supplication! From the injustice of man he turns to God, in the moving words: "My friends scorn me: but mine eye poureth out tears unto God."

2. Again and again Job had challenged God to appear and defend His action. He had implored Him to fulfil two conditions, to suspend the persecution from which he is suffering and not to overwhelm him with the dread of His presence:

"Only do not two things unto me,
Then will I not hide myself from thy face:
Withdraw thine hand far from me;
And let not thy terror make me afraid.
Then call thou, and I will answer;
Or let me speak, and answer thou me."

But God fulfils neither of Job's conditions. When He appears, He does not take His rod from the sufferer, and He speaks out of the whirlwind. Moreover, not only does He leave Job on the rack and appal him with the storm, but He deigns to give no reply to Job's questions, no defence of His own conduct. Rather He speaks roughly to the sufferer, pressing him with questions which convict him of his ignorance. The reader is at first distracted between his wonder at the poet's genius and his disappointment and even resentment at the character of Jehovah's reply. Surely, he thinks, God will now make clear the mystery, but no word is said to explain to Job why he suffers. There is no comfort offered him but what seems like a brutal mockery. Yet if we look more closely we shall see that the speeches of Jehovah are not mere irrelevant irony. Job has taken on himself to criticize the government of the universe. But has he ever realized what the universe is, or how complex the problem of its control? So God brings before him its wonderful phenomena in language of surpassing beauty. The mighty work of its creation, the curbing of the rebellious sea, the land of the dead, the home of light and of darkness, the ordered march of the constellations, the treasuries of snow and hail, which God has stored to overwhelm His enemies, the frost that binds the streams, or the rain that quenches the desert's thirst—all pass before Job's mind and all are too vast, too obscure, for him to comprehend. Then God sketches a series of swift pictures of His animal creation, of whose secrets Job is profoundly ignorant. Thus He brings home to him the limitation of his outlook; thus Job comes to learn the wide range of God's interests.

But it is not what is said about God or known about Him, but Himself as such, that converts and pacifies the heart. He does not solve by what He says, but offers Himself as solution of all life's enigmas. With the heart man believeth unto righteousness. The history and end of all doubt confirms this, in the New

Testament and in the Old, and in modern society. Thomas, unless he put his finger into the print of the nails, would not believe. But when the personal Lord appeared such scrutiny was superseded; Jesus but spoke to elicit that sublimest cry of faith, My Lord and my God. So it was with Asaph in his despair and doubt over the inequalities of Providence and the prosperous wicked—"When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; until I went into the sanctuary of God, then understood I their end." The apparent difficulties to faith are rarely the real difficulties, but all difficulties melt and fuse before the fervency of personal life in God.

¶ I have not a word to say of condemnation of that system of theology which endeavours to clear the relationship of Creator and creature of all difficulty, and justifies God to man by representing Him as exercising over us a sort of limited sovereignty which fully satisfies our ideas of perfect equity, such equity as subsists between a powerful monarch and his subjects. But I am quite unable to receive such a system of belief into myself. A controversialist who makes out that there are no difficulties in revelation seems to me to prove too much; for to say that a disclosure from an Infinite Mind to finite minds is all easy and straightforward is almost to say that there is no such disclosure or that the one claiming to be so received is not Divine. It is indeed an act of love of God, as well as of our neighbour, to make religious difficulties plain; but he is a bold controversialist who in an age of general intelligence denies the existence of difficulties altogether, or even under-estimates their force; and as the facts on man's side are too obvious to be glossed over, the temptation is almost irresistible to make free with God, and to strive to render Him more intelligible by lowering Him to human notions. In the long-run this method of controversy must lead to unbelief. Most men are more satisfied by an honest admission of their difficulty than by an answer to it; few answers are complete, and common sense will never receive a religion which is represented as having no difficulties. It forfeits its character of being Divine, by making such a claim.[1]

[1] *The Spirit of Father Faber* (1914), 75.

V.

Job.

The Book of Job is a religious poem, not a philosophic or a moral poem. Its theme is religion—the relation between the human and the Divine spirit: the attitude of the human soul to God. Job in all his utterances starts from himself, from his own individual experience, and not from any outward aspect which the world or men presented. He at times includes others, even all mankind, in his misery and trial; he had heard of their straits and sorrows too, and in his misery he recalls all he had heard, and, gathering up and combining fragments and shadows, he rears at times a fabric of tremendous horror, commensurate with the race. But his position is properly personal at first; he has not a philosophic view; what draws his attention to God and His general relation to the world is his own case. A jar has occurred there, a dislocation and displacement in his own relation to God. He had formerly been at peace with God; suddenly, whether consciously, or through a single step of reasoning—his sufferings—he beholds God in anger with him, plaguing and tormenting him, hunting him ruthlessly down. He is consciously estranged, and therefore miserable. He knows not why he has lost God, but he has lost Him; his want of knowledge confuses him, and renders him more miserable. God is assailing him—that is fearful; He makes the assault amidst storm and darkness—that augments the terror. The groundwork of the whole poem is this attitude of the man's soul to God, and of God to it.

But Job does not always plead for himself alone; he comes to regard his own case as typical of what is happening in the world generally. He looks around and sees that human life is not organized on the simple principle of rewards and punishments, which his friends bid him acknowledge. He sees the righteous often oppressed and the wicked often flourishing. "From out of the populous city men groan, and the soul of the wounded crieth out: Yet God imputeth it not for folly:" *i.e.*, God does not punish the oppressors. "The earth is given into the hand of the wicked: he covereth the faces of the judges thereof; if it be not he, who then is it?" "Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea,

wax mighty in power? . . . Their houses are safe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them." In short, Job seems to find that moral distinctions do not explain the fortunes of men, and he even suggests that happiness and misery are apportioned indiscriminately. "One dieth in his full strength, being wholly at ease and quiet: . . . And another dieth in bitterness of soul, and never tasteth of good. They lie down alike in the dust, and the worm covereth them." The evils that have come upon Job, therefore, have not merely caused him intense pain; they have, as it were, emptied the earth of God. "Oh that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat! I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments." "Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: on the left hand, when he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him."

¶ Men have dealt hardly with Job's demeanour under the assaults of his friends, more harshly far than Jehovah Himself, as indeed this is men's wont, as for example in the case of Thomas, on whom divines pass a deeply more grievous censure than the Lord Himself. Humanity is not perfect. The heart has its rights, and the utterances of anguish are not to be rigidly measured by the square of dogmatic truth; and we cannot attach to Job the same blame as we should, were his sentiments given out calmly, nor can we attach to the sentiments the same weight as if they were the deliberate convictions of the understanding. The words are mere momentary fragments of passion flung out scorching hot from that deep volcanic heart of his. The Divine poet, with a holy stroke of art, bares the man's breast, and we look within and see the struggling thoughts and passions and regrets battling with each other, and rising fiery and violent as the sparks fly upwards. But these apparently blasphemous words are: (1) either immediate antagonistic positions to those of the friends, and so the direct expressions of a passion self-forgetful for the moment; or (2) they are words spoken in monologue or to God immediately after conflict with the friends; for the poor sufferer, after throwing down his human antagonists, had to stumble forward covered with the dust and blood, and heated with the fury of this combat, to meet his more terrible Divine adversary; and (3) it is the intention of the sacred writer to make Job utter what other men only dare to think; but there is not a word of Job's complaints which even yet good men under strong

affliction will not equal and even surpass. And could we wish Job less open? Is it not for our sakes that this simple heart pours out its awful case in the ear of man and God? There may be a greatness in reticence. It is magnificent to seize the serpent that is twining itself around the heart and struggle silently with it and alone till death or victory. Those are great, if dark, beings, who cover up their thoughts and grapple with them in the midnight of doubt, and, when all eyes are shut, gain their triumph, and, as they looked calm before, look calm after. And perhaps such conflicts must be fought alone; friends, even when near, cannot enter into the strife. Yet Job was not of such sort. His was the open, simple soul, longing for sympathy, living in the light of men's eye, crushed to death by suspicion or desertion, stung to the quick even by the laughter of children. And hence he pours out all that is in his heart, and appeals to men against God, and to God against men, tossed about from earth to heaven in search of sympathy. And this was not weakness, for a greater than he, suffering too under the malice of Satan, went not alone into the conflict, but appealed to His three friends for countenance and help. Job doubtless sinned, and he suffered deeply for his sin, and confessed it and humbled himself; and let us not think how greatly Job failed, but how much more grievously we should have failed under like sore temptation.[1]

1. *Job's Patience.*—There is one important difficulty which readers of the Book of Job at first feel with respect to it; the difficulty, viz., how that holy man acquired his proverbial reputation for the virtue connected with his name. The patriarch Job is held up in the Bible as the great example of patience—"Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord." We therefore not unnaturally come to the Book of Job with the expectation of finding there an uninterrupted expression of acquiescence in the justice and propriety of the providential visitation under which he is suffering. But it is unnecessary to say that these expectations are not fulfilled.

The idea of the character of Job conveyed by that popular and traditional phrase, "the patience of Job," is one not only inadequate, but almost the very opposite of that which we find set before us from the moment that we open the chapters that follow the short and touching narrative with which we are so familiar. As we read these later and central chapters, we find that we have before

[1] A. B. Davidson, *Commentary on Job*, i. p. xxii.

us one who, if he had bowed with entire submission to the greatest of losses and the sharpest of sufferings, yet could lay aside the attitude of the patient sufferer, to assume that of the indignant and restless questioner. It is hardly too much to say that the most striking feature in the book is, not the patience, but the impatience —not the submission, but the uprising, almost the rebellion—of him whom from age to age men of all classes, not only those who have given shape to the superficial impressions of the untaught, but Fathers of the Church, great divines, great teachers, have agreed in calling the Patriarch of Patience. We watch, no doubt, his tender and dutiful resignation; but we listen no less to his bitter cries, his feverish questionings, to his challenges to his Maker, to his agony of despair.

But we see also something more than this. We see how and where he at last found peace and calm and quiet. We restore to him the title of "patient," which for a time we have denied him. But we understand by "the patience of Job," no longer the mere sweet submissiveness which we have hitherto connected with his name. We see in the word something more, something other, than that which we have hitherto understood by it. And we recognize in the patriarch another Job than the Job of our traditions.

¶ Why do we speak of Job's *patience*? He has borne bravely three calamities — the three sent from God; why has he sunk before the one sent by man? He has accepted penury, bereavement, sickness; why has he cried out at the mere suggestion that these are penalties; and why, in spite of that vociferation, has his name been handed down as a synonym for patience? He has stood the hurricane and the tempest; but he has been made to cry out by the lashing of a single wave! Does not the fact of being fretted by so weak a foe deprive him of all right to be the representative of those who wait for God?

I answer, No. I am convinced that, in the view of the artist, the patience of Job is never so conspicuous as in his outcry. Not in spite of, but by reason of, that outcry has he earned his right to a place among those who wait for God. Why *did* Job cry out? Was it not in the *interest* of patience? Was it not patience that *made* him cry out? His friends wanted to *rob* him of his patience —to take away his power to *wait without a reason.* Is not that just the definition of intellectual patience—the power to trust when there is no light, the ability to possess one's soul in the

absence of all explanation of that which afflicts it? Unless we grasp this thought, the personality of Job is meaningless—he is simply an impatient child. But if his impatience springs from the fact that his friends wish to rob him of his *patience*, if his outcry is caused by his desire to be *allowed* to wait for God, then, religiously and artistically, the whole portrait is illuminated, and the claim of Job to his traditional virtue receives triumphant vindication.[1]

2. *Job's Trust.*—The purpose of the Book of Job is something far higher than to refute any definite theory or to teach any definite doctrine. It is the history of a soul in its struggle after God. Here is a man who, by his losses, his bereavements, his horrible disease, and, above all, by the ill-advised conversation of his friends, is driven to the very verge of madness. He had been a good man—the best of men. He had not merely been pious and devout in outward conduct, but had lived, as he thought, in filial communion with God. Now, however, it was as if the great Father were dead. Surely He would not otherwise be deaf to such passionate entreaties. Perhaps, after all, he had been but worshipping a phantom of his own imagination; or worse, perhaps the powerful Being in whom he had believed as a loving God was but a malignant fiend who took pleasure in insulting him—who had once made him glad only to increase his present anguish. But no! when he remembers his past experience, there was something too real, too beautiful, in it to admit of this supposition. He will still trust. Perchance the old blessedness may return. And yet, and yet—and so he goes through all transitions of despair and hope; "now praying and trusting; now utterly cast down; now quiet and submissive; now violent, and ready even to blaspheme; and at last rising suddenly to a height of rapture in which everything disappears in a beatific vision of God."

When we read this book we find that Job is guilty of many wild and unjustifiable utterances with regard to God. He confessed himself that his words were wild, and to his friends they seemed like blasphemy. He was no traitor; he could not weigh his words; he was not like the friends sitting at their ease discussing a question that was not theirs, able to trim their words

[1] G. Matheson.

and keep everything proper and correct. He could not do that, and he did transgress the limits of propriety in speaking about God. But when you come to the end of the book you find this remarkable fact, that, in spite of all the vehemence of his language, Job has from God this testimony—that he had spoken concerning God the thing that was right, as his friends had not. Is it not a marvellous thing that God should so completely disown those men who had tried to speak smooth things to Him, and commend His servant Job, who had said many wild and unwarrantable things concerning Him? But the reason of it was just this, that Job had spoken what he felt, and, in spite of all the hard things he had spoken, he had dared to believe in God, dared to trust Him, dared to speak of Him as upon his side, because he knew that he was faithful to Him. He had blamed God for his own doings, but there was that in his heart which had gained God's approval.

It is easily seen that this storm of passion and doubt into which Job has been worked is one that rages, like all storms in deep waters, merely on the surface; deep down (always when he forgets himself) his faith and fundamental conceptions of God are calm and undisturbed. The very deeps of darkness into which he sinks but give him clearer glimpses of heavenly light, as when one descends between engulfing waves, one sees the stars invisible to those on calmer waters. And out of the extremity of human woe Job rises to the extremity of human hope. Because the perfect conception of misery—concentrated sin and wrath and speedy dissolution—overbalances itself, the mind, from its nature and inherent conceptions of man and God, immediately swings itself aloft, and from the shortness and the miserable abandonment by God of this life, finds and utters the necessity of an endless and blessed life with Him anew. A man with such firm foothold on the past, and such occasional convulsive grasps of the future, is not one readily to fall into Atheism.

We see before us Job's mind and his difficulties, and his prolonged struggle and conflict in accommodating them to each other; we see the soul at each particular stage, not consciously satisfied, yet not consciously subdued so as to renounce God, but progressively and finally victorious over its temptation, even amidst deepest darkness and confusion; and we see precisely what was

the hold which it still convulsively retained, and thus by what means, even amidst perfect ignorance and blindness, a man may still stand true; and all this exhibition rises from the beginning onward and upward into the proclamation of one great truth—*The just shall live by his faith.* And this for us is the highest moral of the whole book, because taught by every section of the book, and by the whole, and especially so emphatically by the Divine words and appearance; for it was this last that calmed all Job's perturbations, not by solving his problem and explaining his sorrows, for his problem and sorrows being ultimately the problem of sin, is insoluble, but by superseding and making unnecessary its solution. A man cannot know here, and he need not know; faith in God is sufficient to carry him through all troubles, and nothing but such faith is sufficient; this supersedes the necessity of knowing.

¶ It would be well for us if we could learn to trust God as we trust those of our fellow-creatures whom we really believe to be good and loving. We could all name individuals, alive or dead, in whose love for us we had such confidence that we should feel satisfied that our eternal interests would be quite safe in their hands, if they had only wisdom and power enough. If we believed that they had the requisite wisdom and power, we should receive every appointment, painful or otherwise, with perfect acquiescence, knowing that it must be for our true good. My daily endeavour is to learn this same lesson in relation to God. I am sure He created me and all men to be partakers in His own eternal life. This I believe is contained in the truth that He created us in Christ. Now this purpose of God I believe to be unchangeable, and that He will follow it on, until it be accomplished. The Shepherd goes after the lost sheep until He finds it. I am persuaded that this is an eternal truth, and the only foundation on which a man who feels himself a sinner—self-destroyed—can lay himself down all his length in absolute trust.[1]

[1] *Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen*, ii. 121.

ISAIAH.

I.

The Life of Isaiah.

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The Life of Isaiah.

Isaiah is very bold.—Rom. x. 20.

1. While Amos and Hosea were executing in the Northern Kingdom the mission with which God had entrusted them, a youth was approaching manhood in the city of Jerusalem who was rarely qualified in personal endowment and by favouring conditions to enter upon a similar work in Judah, and to carry it to a higher stage of development. The peer of these men of God in loyalty, devotion, and courage, he was so situated that a much wider sphere of service was open to him.

It was a crisis in the history of Israel that needed an exceptional messenger. The last half of the eighth century was to witness the fall of the Northern Kingdom. It was hopelessly corrupt. Amos and Hosea had pronounced its doom. The judgment was inevitable. Its ministers were close at hand. Would Jerusalem share the fate of Samaria? How could it escape in the impending conflict between Assyria and Egypt for the supremacy of Western Asia? Lying as it did close to the route which the hostile armies must traverse, its existence was at stake. So human reason would have calculated. But Jehovah's purpose was to preserve His own city; and as the interpreter of that purpose He raised up the prophet Isaiah.

2. The messenger was worthy of the occasion. "Of the other prophets," writes Ewald, "all the more celebrated ones were distinguished by some special excellence and peculiar power, whether of speech or of deed; in Isaiah all the powers and all the beauties of prophetic speech and deed combine to form a symmetrical whole; he is distinguished less by any special excellence than by the symmetry and the perfection of all his powers. There are rarely combined in the same mind the profoundest prophetic emotion and purest feeling, the most unwearied,

successful, and consistent activity amid all the confusions and changes of life, and lastly, true poetic ease and beauty of style, combined with force and irresistible power; yet this triad of powers we find realized in Isaiah as in no other prophet." He is indeed the king among the prophets. During his long ministry of forty years, through evil report and good report, unflinchingly and consistently he delivered Jehovah's message to a people blind to its high calling, deaf to the Divine word, destitute of energizing faith and elevating hope. When they were secure in the conceit of their own arrogant self-confidence, he warned them of the impending judgment. When they trembled in pusillanimous despair at approaching calamity, he encouraged them with the assurance of Divine protection. With unshaken confidence he proclaimed the absolute sovereignty of Jehovah over the nations of the world, and maintained "the eternal hope of the Divine Kingdom upon earth."

3. It has been said of Isaiah that he died with the gospel on his lips. Nowhere can we find the promise of the Messiah more clearly announced; nowhere is the kingdom of the Messiah depicted in colours more lifelike and abiding. The prophetic vision of Isaiah is not restricted by the narrow limits of his age and country; he sees the Church of Christ rising before him and uniting in one the Jew and the Gentile. The day should come, he declared, when Egypt and Assyria, the representatives of the unbelieving powers of the world, should join with Israel in adoring the one true God, when the Lord of Hosts should say of them, "Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands." The prophecies of Isaiah form, as it were, a bridge between the Old Covenant and the New.

But there are other respects besides this in which Isaiah occupies a foremost place among the Hebrew prophets. The old times were passing away, when the prophet appealed to the eye rather than to the ear and the mind. The symbolical actions through which the will of God was made known to His people gave place to solemn warnings, or promises of forgiveness. It is true that the glowing words of the prophet might still at times be accompanied by some visible action, as when Isaiah "walked naked and barefoot three years for a sign and wonder upon Egypt

and upon Ethiopia"; but such visible actions were accompaniments only, and tended to disappear altogether. The prophet became in very truth a *prophêtês* or "announcer" of the will of God to man. The miracles by which an Elijah or an Elisha had attested their power and the truth of their mission made way for the more spiritual testimony of prophecy itself. The range of the prophet's vision was no longer confined to his own nation and people; the message he delivered was addressed to other nations as well. In Isaiah, therefore, we see prophecy increasing in evangelical clearness, in spirituality, and in catholicity. It embraces all men, not the chosen people only, and promises to Jew and Gentile alike the blessings of the Messianic Kingdom.

I.

Isaiah's Youth.

Isaiah the son of Amoz.—Is. i. 1.

The world knows but little of its greatest men. It sees from afar the candle burning in the garret of the thinker, and wists not that it will throw its beams right down the ages. The man who lives in the realm of thought, instead of the realm of action, is generally overlooked while he lives. It is only when his thought has become translated into deeds, perhaps centuries after he is buried, that the world cares to ask who the thinker was, and eagerly snatches at every detail of his personal history. Is there a more pathetic scene in all the biographies of great souls than that of the poet Burns dying neglected by the patrons of his happier days, and yet, with the hopefulness which made his genius so winsome, saying to his weeping wife, "Dinna greet for me; I shall be thought far more of a hundred years hence than I am now"? Of Shakespeare, "the myriad-minded man," we have only a few scraps of history, which may or may not be true. Of Dante we know but little, and of Homer still less. The same is true of Isaiah, the sweetest and most impassioned of all the Hebrew poets. For, in spite of the influence he exercised upon his contemporaries, our knowledge of Isaiah's life is derived for the most part from his own works. It is true that he comes

before us in the Second Book of Kings as the counsellor to whom the Jewish monarch and his ministers betook themselves in their hour of need, as the prophet who was empowered to promise them a speedy deliverance, as the healer who restored Hezekiah to life when all earthly hope of recovery seemed gone, and finally as the stern reprover of the monarch's pride and worldliness. But the passages in which Isaiah is thus brought before us are found also in the book that bears his name; the only additional information we receive is the record in the Second Book of Chronicles (xxxii. 32) that "the rest of the acts of Hezekiah, and his goodness, behold, they are written in the vision of Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz."

¶ A silhouetted form stands before us whose face is hid, whose expression is veiled, whose very attitude is but dimly recognized. Contrast the portraits of an Abraham, an Isaac, a Jacob, a Joseph, with the portraits of an Amos, an Isaiah, a Jeremiah, an Ezekiel, and you will see the full force of the difference. The former are almost modern in the interest they awaken; the latter seem far away. The former are men; the latter are shadows. The former suggest the living world; the latter come like voices from the dead.

How are we to account for this? Is it accident? No, it is too methodical for that; a thing which pervades one class exclusively cannot be accidental. Is it ignorance on the part of the delineator? No; why should the artist know less of Isaiah than of Abraham? Isaiah belonged to an age when knowledge was more easily transmitted than it was in the days of Abraham. Is it the uneventfulness of a prophet's life in comparison with a ruler's life? No, for the facts we wish to learn are just the common uneventful facts that environ men of every day—the place of birth, the home circle, the training influences, the worldly circumstances, the struggles for survival, the loves and hates and hopes and fears that compose the lights and shadows of human life. This is what we want to know; this is what is not revealed.

Is there any explanation which can be suggested for this biographical reticence? I think there is. I believe it originates in the notion that a man's religious message has more power when separated from his personal circumstances. This is not a feeling peculiar to the Jew. It lies at the root of clerical celibacy; it forms the basis of religious asceticism. There has ever been a widespread impression that familiarity with the teacher of sacred

things weakens the force of his message. How often you and I are disappointed when we have realized our wish to meet some distinguished educator of the race. We have figured to ourselves the joy of that meeting—how our hearts will burn, how our souls will be enlightened. And we have found the man a very ordinary individual, with the average amount of human frailties and perhaps more than the average amount of human foibles. The man who habitually lives on the mountains is apt to find himself not at home on the plains. He often shows to less advantage in commonplace things than the essentially commonplace man. The Jew felt this and sought to obviate it. He withdrew the everyday life of his prophets from common observation. He placed his Isaiah in the mist. He shrouded his form and features. He hid his environment. He concealed his domestic altar. He threw a veil over his circle and his circumstances. He allowed only his *voice* to be revealed. He would not let us look, but he bade us listen. He sent a cloud to the eye, but he lifted a curtain from the ear.[1]

1. *Isaiah's Name and Family.*—His name appears not to have been an uncommon one in Israel, and although to the prophet himself it had a symbolic significance as embodying a cardinal principle of his ministry, it throws no light on the circumstances of his birth or the religious disposition of his parents. Of his father Amoz nothing is known. The fancied resemblance of his name to that of the prophet Amos does not exist in the original, and the notion that the younger prophet was the son of the older was only the speculation of some Greek, ignorant of Hebrew orthography. Jewish tradition, perhaps to account for Isaiah's great influence at court, makes his father Amoz a brother of king Amaziah, and the prophet therefore a first cousin of Hezekiah. From the fact, however, that he was intimately acquainted with the ways of the court and had at all times ready access to the presence of the king, as well as from a certain aristocratic loftiness of thought which appears in his writings, we may probably conclude that at least he belonged to a good family and had enjoyed all the advantages of education and social intercourse that were open to the son of a prominent citizen of Jerusalem.

Isaiah's own name signifies "The salvation of the Lord." It

[1] G. Matheson, *The Representative Men of the Bible*, ii. 266.

was thus, as he himself tells us, that he was a "sign and wonder in Israel from the Lord of hosts," like his children, whose names were equally ever-present witnesses of the prophecies he had uttered. The constant burden of his preaching had been that though the heathen should rage for a while against Judah, though the tree of the chosen people should be felled to the root, God would yet have mercy upon it; the root should again put forth its shoots, "a remnant" should return and behold the "salvation of the Lord." His own name was as surely a token of forgiveness to repentant Judah as was the name of his son Shear-jashub, "a remnant shall return."

Shear-jashub was perhaps the eldest of his children. He was, at all events, old enough to accompany his father when he went out of the city to meet Ahaz, who was examining "the conduit of the upper pool" at the beginning of the Syro-Ephraimitic war. At a later date was born Maher-shalal-hash-baz, "spoil swiftly, rob quickly." These were the words Isaiah had been ordered to write on a "large slab," with "the graving-tool of the people," so that all might see and read, and then to give them as a name to the child that was born to him shortly afterwards. The name, like the inscription, was to be a sign that "before the child shall have knowledge to cry, My father, and my mother, the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria shall be taken away before the king of Assyria."

The wife of Isaiah is termed "the prophetess." From this we must infer that she also, like her husband, was endowed with the gift of prophecy. The usage of Hebrew would not allow us to interpret the title as we might perhaps in English, where it could signify simply a prophet's wife.

2. *His City and Circumstances.*—Isaiah was probably a native of Jerusalem, where all his prophecies were apparently given, and seems to have resided in the lower city, which lay to the north of the upper city or Zion as it is now, although incorrectly, called. His ministry dates from 740 B.C., the year of king Uzziah's death, —his call being connected with a glorious vision of Jehovah (Is. vi.), —and lasted at least to 701 B.C., the year of Sennacherib's attack on Jerusalem. Two very important chronological epochs have their beginning in his time: the Roman, 753 B.C. being the tradi-

tional year of the founding of Rome, and the Babylonian, the era of Nabonassar having begun in 747 B.C.

(1) **The City.**—Jerusalem was the hallowed yet comparatively squalid capital of the petty principality of Judah. It was the crown and heart of Jewish life, political and religious. Solomon's temple stood on Zion's ridge. Jehovah of Hosts had there His seat. In the eye of an Israelite it was "beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth." In the eye of her citizens it was the impregnable and inviolable fortress and sanctuary of God. To citizen Isaiah it was the apex of the world. All else might perish, but, as the symbol and seat of the one true faith, Jerusalem must stand. Passionate patriotism and the enthusiasm of religion had girded the city of David with a sanctity unique, and gilded it with a glory imperishable.

The nearest neighbours to the little kingdom were the independent cities of the Philistines to the south-west, and the little principalities of Edom and Moab to the east, while to the north lay the sister but usually unfriendly State of North Israel or Ephraim, with its independent prince reigning in Samaria.

The great Assyrian Empire, with its colossal capital Nineveh and its subordinate but refractory province of Babylonia, held sway over all the East. Over it reigned in Oriental magnificence "the king of kings," in whose eyes the kinglets of Jerusalem and Samaria were as grasshoppers. He numbered his hosts by myriads; his chariots and horsemen covered the land like locusts—their onrush was like an overflowing ocean. In the lifetime of Isaiah this terrific and irresistible force was no less than four times let loose upon the land of Jehovah, and each of these incursions gives occasion to the prophet to utter in powerful prophecy the "word of the Lord concerning Judah and Jerusalem." The terror of this Behemoth of the East hung over Israel and Judah like a perpetual nightmare, paralysing their energies and warping their policy. The winged man-headed bull of Asshur, symbol of intellect, strength, and swiftness, was the veritable ogre of the Jews. They lived in constant dread of falling any day into its merciless clutches as a helpless lamb into a lion's jaws, and to understand Isaiah one must realize this ever-impending danger.

Occupying the other pole of Isaiah's little world was the empire of the Pharaohs, whose dynasties ran back to primeval

time, and whose power, though little exerted beyond the Nile boundaries, was so old and consolidated that it was acknowledged without challenge as a mighty unknown quantity. In the Jewish mind the wholesome fear of Egypt could not fail to be accentuated by the recollection that the fathers of their nation had been brick-making bond-slaves there for generations. And though their prophets called the old empire facetiously "Rahab" the Braggart, the Crocodile, the fear that their nationality might one day, and could any day, be crunched between her cruel jaws was never absent as an impending possibility. One element of weakness within her own borders, the semi-barbarous and restless Soudanese or Ethiopians, combined with the balancing power of Assyria to put off the evil day. The main road, moreover, between Nineveh and the Nile lay along the Mediterranean shore and through the Pass of Esdraelon—a geographical fact which doubtless contributed largely to prolong the security of Jerusalem and Judah.

(2) **The Circumstances.**—Isaiah's boyhood was during a happy period of Judah's history, when the energetic and enterprising Uzziah was on the throne of Judah. This king, crowned when but a youth, enabled his people to recover speedily from the depression to which the stubborn conceit of his father Amaziah had reduced them. With skill and judgment he developed Judah's natural resources, strengthened her defences, and opened many avenues of wealth. He compelled the petty nations round about to resume their old relation as tributaries. He even won back the port of Elath, on the eastern arm of the Red Sea, secured a navy of "ships of Tarshish," and resumed the traffic with South Arabia which Solomon had fostered. He thus made his little kingdom secure, powerful, and prosperous, and gave his people renewed confidence in themselves and in their future. Judah, under King Uzziah, became a fair counterpart of Israel under King Jeroboam II., whose reign was practically contemporaneous. No wonder that the soul of the young Judæan prophet was stirred by the sight of evils similar to those which had kindled the prophetic ardour of Amos—a thoughtless greed for wealth, a consequent abuse of power and opportunity, a forgetfulness of moral standards, all combined with a scrupulousness for religious forms and with a pretence of loyalty to Jehovah—and that his study of

the utterances of Amos and Hosea to the northern people prepared him for a prompt consecration of himself as God's spokesman to the people of Judah.

¶ Over the door of the new church [at Finnieston, Glasgow] are carved the three Hebrew words translated in our Bible, "He that winneth souls is wise." They were put there as an indication of the object of the church's existence, and also in the hope that some Jews passing by might see them, and come in to worship the God of Abraham. Dr. Bonar preached from these words on the day on which the church was opened, explaining that "winning" was the word used to describe a hunter stalking game, and reminding "soul-winners" that their work must be done in a wise way. "How carefully David prepared to meet Goliath! He chose five smooth stones out of the brook. He did not assume that one would be lying to his hand when he needed it. Never go to the Lord's work with meagre preparation."[1]

II.

Isaiah's Call.

I saw the Lord.—Is. vi. 1.

The prophecies of Isaiah have the misfortune not to be arranged in chronological order. The effort to view the events of the prophet's life in their true perspective is, in consequence, attended with some difficulty. Thus Isaiah's "call," though not described till chap. vi., must evidently precede, in order of time, the delivery of the prophecies which stand now as chaps. i. and ii.–v. This presumption, derived from the nature of the prophetic call, is confirmed by internal evidence; for while the call is expressly stated to have taken place in the last year of king Uzziah's reign, chaps. i.–v. contain indications that they were written at a later date. Why the narrative of the prophet's call was not allowed, as in the cases of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, to occupy the first place in the book, is a question which cannot be certainly answered. One conjecture is that chaps. i.–v. were placed first for the purpose of preparing the reader of the book for the severity of tone which marks the end of chap. vi., and of

[1] *Reminiscences of Andrew A. Bonar*, 41.

acquainting him with the condition of things in Judah which led to such a tone being adopted. Or, again, it is possible that chap. vi. may have been placed so as to follow chaps. i.–v. because, though describing what occurred earlier, it may not have been actually committed to writing till afterwards—perhaps as an introduction to chaps. vii. 1–ix. 7. In a biography of the prophet the call will of course occupy its proper and natural position.

1. It was amidst the forebodings naturally suggested by the death of Uzziah that Isaiah became conscious of his prophetic vocation. The statement that he first saw the Lord "in the year that king Uzziah died" has doubtless something more than a mere chronological interest. The aged monarch, who had so well upheld the credit of the State, was either just dead or in the last stages of leprosy. The recent history of the kingdom of Samaria furnished an ominous warning of the troubles that might follow the removal of a capable ruler at such a time; and it may be that Isaiah had a presentiment that the death of this king would be the prelude to a period of anarchy and confusion such as he afterwards pictured as a feature of the Divine judgment on Israel's sin. The significance of the vision of chap. vi. becomes at least somewhat more intelligible to our minds if we regard it as the answer to apprehensions such as these. At a time when his thoughts were occupied with the death of a sovereign whom he had learned to revere as the embodiment of wise and experienced statesmanship, there was granted to Isaiah a revelation of Him who was the true Divine King of Israel; and at the same time he gained a perception of the ultimate issues of Jehovah's dealings with the nation which enabled him to face the dark and threatening future with confidence and hope.

2. The prophets uniformly speak of themselves as actuated in their work by a power not their own. It is the God of Israel in whose service they stand, whose purposes they declare, whether of judgment or of salvation, whose message they deliver to His people. Their declarations are continually prefaced or attested by the words, "Thus saith Jehovah," or "Oracle of Jehovah." Such expressions as these are not, indeed, to be taken as implying that the words which they utter were placed mechanically upon their

lips—the varying style and phraseology of different prophets, to say nothing of other grounds, forbids this supposition; but they must be understood to imply the conviction that the substance and purport of what they utter is not their own, only the form in which it is cast bearing the stamp of their own genius and literary art. Not only is this conviction a characteristic of the whole activity of a prophet, it is especially prominent in all the accounts which we possess of the occasion on which a prophet was first made aware of the vocation which he was destined to pursue in life. The prophets do not speak of a resolution or purpose, framed by themselves, to devote themselves to their vocation; but they describe a moment in which they received a *call—i.e.*, to speak from a human point of view, were conscious of a sudden intuition, impressing itself upon them with irresistible clearness and force, and, in certain instances, communicated to them in the form of a vision. Thus Amos refers to this moment of his life in the following words: "I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son (*i.e.*, no professed member of a prophetic guild); but I was an herdman, and a dresser of sycomore trees: and *Jehovah took me from following the flock*, and Jehovah said unto me, Go feed my people Israel." Amos was thus diverted from secular employment by an inward prompting, the guidance of which he could not resist. He does not, however, state that the call came to him in a vision. Both Ezekiel and Isaiah, and apparently Jeremiah as well, experienced a vision at the time of their call. The necessity of obeying the prophetic summons is finely expressed by Amos: "The lion hath roared, who will not fear? the Lord Jehovah hath spoken, who can but prophesy?"

¶ We ponder the circumstances under which the word of God came to those men in old time; and we ask whether we can have a trial which does not find its counterpart in their experience, whether we can desire a blessing which does not find its pledge in their endowments. We too must see God—see God and not merely gather speculations and dogmas about Him—if we are to declare Him; and He is ready to show Himself to us as we need to see Him. We too must hear God—hear God and not merely gather the manifold records of His utterances to our fathers—if we are to speak in His name to our own generation; and He will make Himself heard if we school our hearts to patient silence. He is showing Himself, declaring His will on every side. We

can, unhappily—most sad distortion of freedom—look and listen to ourselves instead of looking and listening to Him. In any case, whatever we really see and hear we shall most assuredly teach, whether we wish to teach it or not, and that only. And what will be the difference of our teaching to ourselves, even more than to others, if we recognize the work which God has prepared for us to do as ministers of His Truth, and give ourselves wholly to it![1]

3. God's call is inexorable. Nothing more surely marks the Divine voice in a great soul than its persistence. Isaiah might have stilled the voice by absolutely disregarding and defying it. But he was a true man, of devout spirit, and was at least ready to listen. He went to the Temple, as apparently was his custom when in perplexity, that he might, in that sacred place, pour out his soul to Jehovah. The hand of God pursued him in the sanctuary. As he prayed, he saw a vision with that inner eye which is sometimes more truthful in its sight than the outward eye. The sight of God filled him with the terror which it inspired in every Hebrew. How could sinful eyes look upon the holy God without peril? The personal disqualification which had long stood in the way of obedience was put now in the specific form of the unclean lips. God met the objection by sending a seraph to remove the taint. The effect reached further than the lips. The prophet's hearing also was made acute by the purification. God needs but to touch one part, and man is every whit clean. Isaiah heard again the Lord calling for a volunteer: "Whom shall I send?" The obstacle which had hindered him so long was swept away. Peace came to the perplexed soul. Duty became clear, and the impulse arose to follow it at any cost. "Here am I, send me." The uncertainty of weeks, and perhaps of months, is all gone. Isaiah comes from the Temple with his life's work settled. However resolutely he had stood against former calls to the prophetic office, he succumbs completely now, and henceforth gives himself to the proclaiming of God's message to the world.

¶ That this call was supernatural, in the true sense of being Divine, is as unquestionable to me as it was to its object. But that its manner of operation was not essentially different from thousands of other calls is a truth too important to be lightly thrust aside. God has been calling men to His service all through

[1] B. F. Westcott, *Peterborough Sermons*, 269.

the ages. Doubtless there is a personal appropriateness in the form of every call. Nevertheless God is the same in all ages; man is man in all ages; and the Divine influence upon the soul is substantially the same. We can have no purpose to lower Isaiah's call. On the contrary, I believe the right explanation raises it. It is a greater thing that God keeps every planet in its place than that He should disarrange the system by the temporary stopping of one of them. The speaking of God to every soul that listens is vastly more supernatural, to use a too hackneyed term, than the speaking only to a soul now and then. The important thing about such a call is its reality. It is a bad condition for a man to be a blacksmith whom God calls to be a carpenter; it is much worse to be a prophet contrary to the Divine will. Isaiah's call was real. It led him to his true life.[1]

4. The spiritual truths impressed on the prophet's mind by this memorable experience are those which we see unfolded with singular clearness and constancy of purpose throughout his whole subsequent ministry.

(1) Of these the first and most fundamental is an overwhelming sense of the majesty and holiness of Jehovah, the God of Israel. These aspects of the Divine nature are prominent in nearly every page of Isaiah's writings, and the prophet's sense of them is undoubtedly to be traced to that supreme moment of his spiritual history when his eyes saw the King, Jehovah of Hosts, and he shrank in terror from the contact of His holiness.

¶ We all need the discipline, the inspiration of awe. Wonder —this fear of the Lord—is always the beginning of wisdom. And we specially need the discipline, the inspiration now. There is, I think, great danger lest the realism, the extremity, the earthliness which have spread far over modern life and thought should dominate our religion. We are impatient of indefiniteness, of obscurity, of indecision; we are impatient of mystery, of reserve, of silence. We are tempted to treat Divine things with a strange familiarity, to use human modes of conception and feeling and representation not only as provisional helps towards the formation of spiritual ideas, as we must, but as the measures of them. We draw sharp outlines which can have no existence in the brightness which is about the throne. So it comes to pass that symbols, outward acts, formulas, the Holy Sacraments themselves in many cases, tend to confine and narrow the devotion which they were

[1] L. W. Batten, *The Hebrew Prophet*, 94.

designed to elevate and enlarge. But we cannot rest with impunity in that which is of this world. So to rest is to lose the highest. To pierce through the outward is to find a new world. Isaiah felt this when the eyes of his heart were opened. The whole aspect of the Temple service, august as it was, was changed for him. When the veil was withdrawn, he saw not what he looked for,—the Ark and the carved Cherubim and the luminous cloud,—but the Lord in His kingly state, and angels standing with outstretched wings ready to serve, and the earth full of His glory as an illimitable background to the marvellous scene. Something like this it is which we must strain the eyes of our heart to see, and, having seen, to interpret to our people.[1]

(2) In the second place, Isaiah was then possessed by the consciousness of a life-long mission to be discharged in the service of the Divine King as His messenger and spokesman to Israel. The alacrity with which he offers himself for this work, without knowing what it might involve, is a revelation of the ardent temperament of the man and contrasts strikingly with the hesitation displayed by another great prophet at a similar moment of his life.

¶ The consciousness of being sent from God with a mission for which the time is ripe, and the consciousness of eager return to God, of the great human struggle after Him, possessing a nature which cannot live without Him—the imperious commission from above and the tumultuous experience within—these two, not inconsistent with each other, have met in all the great Christian workers and reformers who have moved and changed the world. These two lived together in the whole life of Luther. The one spoke out in the presence of the emperor at Worms. The other wrestled unseen in the agonies of the cloister cell at Erfurt. The broad and vigorous issue of the two displayed itself in the exalted but always healthy and generous humanity which, with pervasive sympathy, filled and embraced all the humanity about it, not as persuasions or convictions—that would not have worked any such result—but as the living forces which exalted and refined and consecrated and enlarged a nature of great natural nobility and richness. So it was that the sense of the divine commission and the profoundness of the human struggle created the Luther who shook the thrones of pope and Cæsar and made all Europe new.[2]

[1] B. F. Westcott, *Peterborough Sermons*, 270.
[2] Phillips Brooks, *Essays and Addresses*, 377.

(3) But Isaiah further learned something of the nature and effects of the work to which he was thus consecrated. It is a gloomy and discouraging prospect that is disclosed to him—a people so hardened in unbelief that the very abundance of his revelations and the urgency of his appeals will only render them more and more insensible to spiritual influences, while step by step the inevitable judgment is executed upon them until the existing nation of Israel has been utterly consumed.

¶ Sin, once committed, seems over and done; sinners promise themselves impunity, and earthly judges sleep; but the cry of violated purity—as of yore the cry of an innocent brother's blood, and in later ages the cry of labourers' hire kept back by fraud—fills earth and heaven, eloquently appealing to God to punish the guilty.

> My conscience hath a thousand several tongues,
> And every tongue brings in a several tale.

This idea of crime demanding retribution pervaded the ancient world; it was exhibited with terrific power in Greek tragic poetry. God acts according to the strict laws of justice, His judgments are preceded by a full and impartial inquiry, He condemns no man without a trial. "He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness." Vengeance is called His strange work. Still He vindicates His character as the Judge of all the earth, who will by no means clear the guilty. All His judgments have a merciful purpose. His severity has love at its core as its motive. It condemns the wicked in mercy to the rest of mankind. It prevents the torrent of sin from rushing over the world. It seeks the purity of the race when it removes those families which have become horribly depraved. "When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness."[1]

(4) And finally the vision contains a ray of hope in the promise of an indestructible Remnant in Israel, a "holy seed" or spiritual kernel of the nation, which shall survive the judgment and become the germ of the ideal people of God. This last idea of the Remnant, which is one of the most distinctive in Isaiah's teaching, was perhaps also the first to receive public expression; for it is embodied in the name of a son, Shear-jashub, who must have been born to the prophet very soon after his inaugural vision.

[1] J. Strahan, *Hebrew Ideals*, i. 120.

¶ Among the predictions of Isaiah there is one which is distinguished from all the rest, because it promises a blessing, and a blessing which appears to lie beyond the limits of a statesman's vision. Yet its inclusion in the list was no accident. The belief that, after all Israel's disasters, "a remnant shall return" and shall grow into a pure and noble nation, is one of the prophet's most firmly-rooted convictions. As early as the reign of Jotham it was registered in the name given to the prophet's son, Shear-Jashub; it was reiterated in the prophecies of his prime; and it blends with the Messianic hopes of his old age. The boldness of such a hope must have startled those who first heard it uttered: for they knew that a restoration of exiles could not be accomplished until the settled policy of the Assyrian empire was reversed. And even when Assyria fell and Babylon took its place, the system of deportation and denationalization was maintained. Nothing less was required than that a new empire, based upon new principles, should sweep away the old. Yet that came to pass when Cyrus became lord of the East and fulfilled the hopes which for two hundred years had lain embalmed in Shear-Jashub's name. A prediction so strange and so strangely fulfilled is not sufficiently explained by reference to Isaiah's political sagacity. The eye which sees across two centuries is the eye of a prophet.[1]

III.

Isaiah's Ministry.

Here am I; send me.—Is. vi. 8.

1. Isaiah's ministry, as we have already seen, began at the close of the reign of Uzziah of Judah, whose rule synchronized roughly with that of Jeroboam II. of Israel. The reigns of both of these kings were times of great prosperity for their respective countries. Israel under Jeroboam recovered much of the strength and importance which it had lost under his predecessor Joash, and its borders were extended both in the north (at the expense of Damascus and Hamath) and in the south (presumably to the detriment of Moab). Uzziah in Judah also developed the military resources of his kingdom; he conducted successful wars against the Philistines and Arabians; and he received tokens of homage from the more distant Ammonites. Agriculture was

[1] M. G. Glazebrook, *Studies in the Book of Isaiah*, 76.

encouraged, and commerce was fostered by the facilities arising from the possession of the port of Elath (or Eloth) on the Red Sea. But in both countries prosperity brought vices in its train. In Israel there prevailed a tone of national pride and arrogance which took no account of the judgments with which the Lord had previously humbled the nation; and this irreligious self-confidence was accompanied by idolatry, luxury, and sensuality. In Judah the resultant conditions were similar. There, too, the increase of wealth and of military strength had produced a proud sense of security; the inclination to idolatry was fostered by foreign trade, which led to the introduction of foreign superstitions; drunkenness was common; and a spirit of scepticism and a confusion of moral distinctions penetrated society. The accumulation of riches enabled the wealthier classes to acquire most of the land of the country, and so tended to impair and to destroy the independence of the poor. Nor was the evil of the existence of a large landless and dependent class brought about only by the action of economic forces. Justice was corrupt; and the expropriation of the peasant proprietors was accomplished by dishonest means. It was the prevalence of these and other abuses that first impelled Isaiah to undertake the work of religious and social reform. He foresaw that the continuance of them could only rouse the resentment of a holy and righteous God, and that a heavy judgment was impending over both branches of the Hebrew people.

Jotham continued his father's policy with success. He strengthened the fortifications of Jerusalem, built castles and towers in the forests, perhaps beyond Jordan, and suppressed an Ammonite revolt. Only towards the end of his reign were the murmurs of the coming storm heard. Pekah and Rezin attacked him, though without success. But it was a warning of what was in store for his successor. In these circumstances Isaiah commenced his ministry.

2. It is convenient to distinguish three periods of Isaiah's ministry, which, although very unequal in length, are marked each by some features peculiar to itself. The first period extends from the death of Uzziah to the beginning of the reign of Ahaz. The second is the critical period of the Syro-Ephraimitic invasion,

about 735. The third is the time of the Assyrian domination, culminating in the invasion and deliverance of the year 701. During all the great crises Isaiah consistently opposed the policy of the Jewish kings to enter into alliances with foreign powers. He knew that the two great world-empires, Assyria and Egypt, were preparing for a coming struggle, and that each successively sought the alliance of the smaller states which separated them. Isaiah's persistent counsel was to stand aloof from both. "In quietness and confidence," in the loving guidance of Jehovah, was to be their strength. He especially warned the Jews of the folly of relying upon Egypt, whom he contemptuously calls Rahab Sit-still (*i.e.*, "Braggart, that sitteth still"), and confidently predicted that Zion, in splendid isolation though closely beset and endangered, would yet remain absolutely inviolate. It was thus religion that in a sense made Isaiah a politician. In addition to this it was his special work to denounce the social wrongs and iniquity of his time and to point forward to a glorious future. Amid the general faithlessness and idolatry he never wavered in his loyalty and fidelity to Jehovah, and to the covenant which God had made with Israel.

3. The political risks of the course he advocated were indeed tremendous; for a renewed declaration of war against Assyria must have seemed to all human sagacity a perfectly desperate policy. But far more momentous were the religious issues at stake. If Jerusalem had then been surrendered or captured, all that had been gained by the work of Isaiah and other prophets would have been lost to Israel and to the world. The spiritual religion which lay in germ in the teaching of Isaiah was not as yet capable of existing apart from the nationality in which it had been born, and hence the preservation of the Hebrew State was of paramount importance for the conservation of the true knowledge of God. Yet, with all this in view, Isaiah never wavered. While all around him were paralysed with fear, his confidence remained unshaken, and in the supreme hour of danger he boldly announced that the city would be saved and the word of the Lord established. His success in this last emergency, after so many defeats at the hands of an unbelieving nation and its rulers, was an event which has had, as Robertson

Smith says, "more influence on the life of subsequent generations than all the conquests of Assyrian kings; for it assured the permanent vitality of that religion which was the cradle of Christianity."

4. Isaiah seems to have lived to a fair old age. The superscription of his prophecies tells us that he saw his "vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah." It is an attractive conjecture of Duhm that his most soaring pictures of the Messiah's Kingdom come from his latest years, when the aged prophet, after a life spent in labour and conflict, turned with rapture to that ideal future which in spite of all delays and disappointments must surely be realized. It is an attractive idea, but nothing more. A Jewish tradition current in the 2nd century A.D. asserts that he outlived Hezekiah and perished in the heathen reaction under Manasseh; but this also, though not inherently incredible, is destitute of historical value. This is a case in which the silence of Scripture is as instructive as its speech. For it reminds us that Isaiah's life-work really ended with the events of 701. It was enough for one man to have guided the policy of his country through its first eventful collision with the world-power, which in its own ruthless fashion was preparing the way for a new civilization; to have enunciated the principles of the moral government of the universe that made monotheism a practical power in history; to have enriched eschatology with the figure of the ideal King of God's Kingdom; to have formed within the Jewish State a prophetic party in which the religion of the spirit eventually detached itself from its national environment; and to have left behind him an illustrious example of that faith in the unseen and eternal without which humanity cannot reach the goal appointed for it in the redemptive purpose of God.

¶ Bishop Boyd Carpenter, recounting a conversation that he had with Tennyson about the difficulties of belief in the goodness of God, says: "Then he added, 'After all, the greatest thing is Faith.' Having said this, he paused, and then recited with earnest emphasis the lines which sang of faith in the reality of the Unseen and Spiritual, of a faith, therefore, which can wait the great disclosure:

Doubt no longer that the Highest is the wisest and the best,
Let not all that saddens Nature blight thy hope, or break thy rest,
Quail not at the fiery mountain, at the shipwreck, or the rolling
Thunder, or the rending earthquake, or the famine, or the pest.

Neither mourn if human creeds be lower than the heart's desire;
Thro' the gates that bar the distance comes a gleam of what is higher.
Wait till death has flung them open, when the man will make the Maker
Dark no more with human hatred in the glare of deathless fire."[1]

[1] *Tennyson and his Friends*, 304.

ISAIAH.

II.

The Work of Isaiah.

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The Work of Isaiah.

These things said Isaiah, because he saw his glory; and he spake of him. —John xii. 41.

There is a characteristic of the prophets which must be steadily kept in view if their position and significance are to be rightly apprehended. The prophets, one and all, stand in an intimate relation to the history of their times. Whatever be the truth which they announce, it is never presented by them in an abstract form; it is always brought into some relation with the age in which they live, and adapted to the special circumstances of the persons whom they address. Of course the principles which the prophets assert are frequently capable of a much wider range of application; their significance is not exhausted when they have done their work in the prophet's own generation; but still his primary interest is in the needs of his own age. The vices which Amos or Hosea denounces are those of the kingdom of Israel in the middle of the eighth century B.C.; and though they would have raised their voice not less loudly had they lived at some other period of Israelite history in which the same faults were prevalent, the form which their denunciations assume, the characteristic features of society which they attack, are those of the age in which they themselves lived.

Similarly in their theology, while there is naturally a series of fundamental principles common to the prophets generally, each prophet in particular possesses a special individual element, partly conditioned by his own genius and temperament, partly determined by the course of general events in the world in which he moves. As men expressing habitually their judgment on the conduct of public affairs, and holding decided political views, it will be still more evident that the principles advocated by them must stand in a definite relation to the circumstances of particular junctures, and to the attitude assumed on such occasions by

the nation generally. The position taken by Amos, for instance, in view of the Assyrians, is very different from that taken by Jeremiah at a subsequent period with reference to the Babylonians. Many of Isaiah's most important prophecies are dependent upon the relation which Judah, through the action of its responsible rulers, occupied alternately towards one or other of the two great empires of Assyria and Egypt. It is thus essential, if the work of any prophet is to be properly understood, to study it in the light of contemporary history.

In the case of Isaiah we are peculiarly fortunate in being able to do this; for the decipherment of the Cuneiform Inscriptions of Assyria has enabled us to watch the movements of the Assyrian kings, almost year by year, through the whole period of his ministry, and the result has been to exhibit this great prophet's character and position with a distinctness and completeness which, antecedently, would assuredly not have been anticipated.

The possibilities of the prophetic office are nowhere more splendidly illustrated than in the career of Isaiah. Called in early manhood to the service of Jehovah, he gave himself to his mission with a whole-hearted devotion and a singleness of aim which suffered no abatement in the course of a long and strenuous life. The work of a prophet was the vocation of his life, and every faculty of his being, every source of influence open to him, his social position, and even the incidents of his private history, were all made subservient to the one end of impressing the mind of God on his generation. And to this task he brought a nature richly endowed with gifts belonging to the highest order of genius. He is great alike in thought and in action, and unites the profoundest religious insight with a wide knowledge of men and affairs. If any single quality can be selected as specially prominent in Isaiah, it is an imperious and masterful decision of character which makes him perfectly unhesitating in his judgments and inexorable in his demands. But more remarkable than any one feature is the balance and harmonious working of powers rarely combined in a single individual. In the union of statesmanlike sagacity with impassioned and dignified oratory he may be compared with some of the greatest names in the history of republican Rome; but Isaiah had, besides, the rapt vision of the seer and the fervour of religious enthusiasm.

We shall consider Isaiah in his character as Theological Thinker, as Social Reformer, and as Political Counsellor.

I.

Isaiah the Theological Thinker.

Every prophet was a theologian. His teaching rested upon that aspect of the Divine character which had been specially brought home to his consciousness. But Isaiah is pre-eminently a theologian. The vision in which he received his call was a revelation of the glory of Jehovah, exhibiting the supreme attributes of majesty and holiness. An overwhelming sense of these attributes was burnt into his inmost soul. It shaped his view of Jehovah's relation to Israel and of Israel's behaviour to Jehovah, and formed the inspiration and dominating idea of his teaching.

His theological beliefs, as presented in his writings, are not abstracted from the controversies in which they took shape and systematized into a body of doctrine, but appear in connexion with the emergencies which called for their expression. He emphasized from time to time different aspects of the Divine character, as he conceived it in opposition to the prevalent misconceptions of his countrymen; and his theology remains in the form it assumed under the pressure of practical needs. His convictions respecting the Lord's nature, supremacy, and purposes are not in general peculiar to himself, but are shared by his contemporaries Amos, Hosea, and Micah. The religious beliefs of all of the eighth-century prophets were influenced by the momentous changes occurring or impending in the political world around them. The extinction by Assyria of the smaller nationalities involved either the conclusion that Israel's God was inferior to Asshur, the god of Assyria, or the conclusion that He was a Being of altogether different nature and authority, whose dealings with His own nation had to be accounted for on other principles than those which were popularly thought to explain them; and it was in the second that these prophets believed the truth to lie. Their convictions that the Lord was a holy and righteous God enabled them to interpret the movements of history which portended

disaster to their own country as due not to any defect of power on the part of the Lord but to the execution of a moral purpose of which Assyria was His instrument. But whilst the views which they held respecting the Lord and the service that He required from His people embraced much that was common to all of them, each accentuated those sides of the truth which the circumstances of his own time seemed to demand or to which his own genius and temperament inclined him.

In the case of Isaiah, from the beginning his message contained some elements not to be found in the writings of his contemporaries; while other distinctive conceptions emerge in the course of his active ministry. Being pre-eminently a man of action and a statesman, his firm grasp of political facts imparts a special direction to his thoughts of the Divine Kingdom; and the necessity of presenting a definite religious policy to the rulers of the State gives a precision and a fulness to his forecasts of the future in which he is hardly equalled by any other prophet. At the same time, there is an organic unity in his teaching, all his leading ideas being implicitly contained in a few simple but comprehensive principles disclosed to him in his inaugural vision.

1. Isaiah is a *monotheist* in the strictest sense of the term. There is no sentence in his writings which suggests that he attributed any sort of real existence to the false gods of the heathen; and if he never reasons on the subject of the Divine unity, it is because the fact was too fundamental in his mind to admit of demonstration. He frequently speaks of idols as "the work of men's hands"; his favourite designation for them is *elîlîm* ("not-gods" or "nonentities"), a word which he himself seems to have coined to express his sense of their unreality. No language could be more opposed to the spirit of idolatry than this; for it expressly denies the belief which is at the foundation of the worship of idols, namely, that the image is the abode of a supernatural being able to protect and help his votaries. Nor are the prophet's allusions to the primitive nature-worship which survived in the land less intolerant, or less decisive as to his attitude towards the polytheistic tendencies of his countrymen. For him, in short, there was but one Divine Being; and all his conceptions

of Godhead are summed up in the revelation which made him a prophet, the vision of Jehovah, the Holy One of Israel.

¶ The Hebrew doctrine of God grew up out of polytheism, for the fathers had their many gods. It was not a philosophical doctrine, but an outgrowth of moral and religious life. It appears to have passed through the henotheistic stage, affirming one God for Israel while there were other gods for other peoples; but under the influence of the prophets it became a doctrine of genuine monotheism, affirming one God alone existing. It was not merely an ordinary development from the polytheism of early days, but was rather a reaction against it. It came from those deep and inspiring insights of the best men that so well deserve the name of revelation. The living God was manifesting Himself to men who could discern Him. It was in the ethical life and the life of religion that the conviction of the Divine unity was borne in. God was conceived as bearing the qualities that we call personal, and as having such character as to command a reverence and loyalty such as no deity had ever obtained. He was conceived as living, knowing, loving, desiring, purposing, directing His own action, and influential upon the affairs of men. It was a doctrine of Divine unity that stood in contrast to everything pantheistic: it was a true monotheism, a doctrine of one personal God. Monotheism is contrasted with polytheism in affirming the unity of the Divine, and with pantheism in affirming the personality. The Hebrew doctrine proclaimed both.[1]

2. The attributes of the Lord which impressed themselves most deeply upon Isaiah's mind were His *holiness* and His *glory*. These were the subjects of the hymn of the seraphim in his vision; and it was these that he felt to be more especially outraged by his sinful countrymen.

(1) Holiness is not of course an attribute now for the first time ascribed to Jehovah. It is used by Isaiah's predecessors. To Amos it is the essential characteristic of Deity. "The Lord Jehovah," he says, "hath sworn by his holiness." That is synonymous with swearing *by Himself*. In Hosea He is proclaimed to be the Holy One in the midst of Ephraim. Nor is it a title which was limited to the sphere of revelation. Other Semitic nations applied it to their gods; but revelation takes it, and invests it with a deeper significance. Among the Semitic nations holiness was the quality which distinguished gods in general from men,

[1] W. N. Clarke, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 268.

and did not necessarily convey any moral significance. Hence, to describe the Lord as holy did not verbally mean more than calling Him Divine. But by Isaiah the word was employed in an ethical sense, and as applied to the Lord, it connoted especially the quality of righteousness. It implied that the Lord was separated from mankind not merely by perfection of power, but by perfection of moral purity.

Thus the writings of the Hebrew prophets, and of Isaiah in particular, mark an important stage in the development of this notion of holiness. At first sight it might seem inexplicable that a purely formal idea, expressing no positive conception beyond that of awe-inspiring power and majesty, should become a central doctrine of the prophetic theology. But in truth it is the very vagueness and comprehensiveness of the term that explain the profound significance attaching to it in the mind of Isaiah. By taking this word, which by universal consent embraced all that was distinctive of Deity, *and restricting it to Jehovah*, he expressed the fundamental truth that in the God of Israel and in Him alone are concentrated all the attributes of true Divinity. Holiness thus ceases to be an abstract quality shared by a number of Divine beings; it comes to denote the fulness of what Jehovah is as He is known from His revelation of Himself to the consciousness of the prophet. It signalizes the most notable fact in the religious history of Israel—the formation of an idea of God which at once placed an impassable gulf between Jehovah and all other beings who claimed the title of Divine; and it is this positive idea of God, expressed in the doctrine of Jehovah's unique holiness, that is the mainstay of Isaiah's ministry.

¶ Jehovah, the Lord of all, is known to the Hebrew prophets as ineffable and supreme in His holiness and righteousness. He is not removed from the material universe, for He sustains and controls all its mighty and glorious powers. It is no deceptive shadow cast upon His glory. It is the robe of beauty which He wears. It is a majestic array of powers, every one of which is but a quick sensitive servant of His will. Nor is He cut off from human life. The children of men are no less His creatures than the sun and the moon in their splendour. Nay, they too are His servants, wherever they live and whatever false or unreal gods in their pathetic ignorance or bestial sin they may worship. But in His holiness and righteousness Jehovah recognizes one fact

which is utterly hostile to His nature, His character, and His will—that is, human sin. Here prophetism speaks a most terrible message. Nothing further can it say until the bitter fact is fully and humbly recognized by men, that in one only spot has God no place, that is in the heart of the evil-doer. For God is holy and righteous, and His attitude towards the unholy and unrighteous will is and must be one of inexorable and complete hostility.[1]

(2) The Lord's *glory*, in the sense which it has in the seraphs' song, is equivalent to the majesty pertaining to Him in virtue of His sovereign power. It is spoken of chiefly in two senses: first, of the honour and praise due to Him from men (or angels); and, second, of the dazzling brightness in which He arrays Himself when He supernaturally manifests His presence on earth. Neither of these meanings, however, quite suits the use of the term in the second line of the seraphs' hymn, which, literally translated, reads, "the fulness of the whole earth is his glory." Obviously "glory" is here something objective, as distinct from the glory ascribed to God in the praises of His creatures; while it is at the same time something "far more deeply interfused" with nature than the supernatural phenomena of the cloud of fire and light. The general idea must be that all that the world contains, all that is sublime and powerful in nature, is the outward expression and symbol of the majesty which belongs to Him as the God of all the earth.

¶ When Isaiah had his vision of God's holiness, he was told that it does not require a supernatural event to see the holiness, which is another name for the goodness, of God. The Seraphim sang their song of adoration, and said, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the fulness of the whole earth is his glory." Our English versions translate the words of the Seraphim, "The whole earth is full of his glory." It is quite true, but it is not an accurate translation. And the accurate translation is better: "The fulness of the whole earth is his glory." For this earth of ours is a world on which He has lavished the riches of His nature. It is a full earth. At the return of every season we scatter a few seeds on the soil of it, and it brings forth "some an hundred fold." Test its inexhaustibleness, He seems to say. It is full of the goodness of God. Its fulness is His glory.[2]

[1] W. D. Mackenzie, *The Final Faith*, 32.
[2] *Expository Times*, March 1915, p. 242.

3. The thought of God as the *universal Sovereign* is specialized in the idea of His kingship over Israel, an idea whose influence makes itself felt in the whole of the prophet's activity. Israel is the immediate sphere of Jehovah's royal functions, and it is in His name that Isaiah claims an authoritative voice in the direction of the affairs of the State. He speaks to his countrymen as one who has "seen the King" and has been commissioned to declare His will as the supreme law of the nation. Thus through the medium of the prophetic word the abstract doctrine of the Divine sovereignty is translated into living and personal relations between Jehovah the King and Israel His kingdom. Similarly, the supreme quality of holiness, or essential Divinity, becomes a practical factor in religion through being brought to bear on Jehovah's relation to His people. He is, to use a favourite title of Isaiah, "the Holy One *of Israel*," *i.e.*, the Holy Being who is the God of Israel. Here again Israel is conceived as the community within which Jehovah reveals Himself as He truly is, and by which His character as the Holy One is to be recognized and exhibited to the world. The whole of Isaiah's conception of national religion is summed up in the phrase to "sanctify the Lord of Hosts"; that is, to acknowledge and worship His Godhead, and to cherish towards Him the sentiment of fear and reverence which was impressed on the prophet's own mind by the revelation of His holiness.

¶ Belief in Divine sovereignty bears several fruits which are not over-abundant in our day; for one thing, it creates a majestic view of God, and this lies at the root of becoming and reverent religion. The unconscious irreverence of certain forms of religion in our day and the flabbiness of religious faith spring from inadequate conceptions of the power and righteousness of God. When one believes with the marrow of his bones that at the heart of the universe God reigns Almighty, All-Righteous, All-Wise, and All-Loving, then he has a worthy object of faith and a strong ground for prayer and a good hope of salvation. He is able to possess his soul in patience because he knows that above the fret and turmoil of this present life God is doing His will and accomplishing His purposes; and in his own straits and dangers he has in God a refuge and a hiding-place. The greatest reinforcements which religion could have in our time would be a return to the ancient belief in the sovereignty of God.[1]

[1] J. Watson, *The Doctrines of Grace*, 138.

4. But it must not be supposed that Isaiah had no gospel for the individual. This will seem impossible if we remember three facts.

(1) *Isaiah himself had passed through a remarkable individual experience.*—He had not only felt the solidarity of the people's sin: "I dwell among a people of unclean lips"; he had first felt his own particular guilt: "I am a man of unclean lips." One who suffered the private experiences which are recounted in chap. vi.; whose *own eyes* had *seen* the *King, Jehovah of hosts*; who had gathered on his own lips his guilt and felt the fire come from heaven's altar by an angelic messenger specially to purify him; who had further devoted himself to God's service with so thrilling a sense of his own responsibility, and had so felt his solitary and individual mission thereby—he surely was not behind the very greatest of Christian saints in the experience of guilt, of personal obligation to grace, and of personal responsibility. Though the record of Isaiah's ministry contains no narratives, such as fill the ministries of Jesus and Paul, of anxious care for individuals, could he who wrote of himself that sixth chapter have failed to deal with men as Jesus dealt with Nicodemus, or as Paul with the Philippian gaoler? It is not picturesque fancy, nor merely a reflection of the New Testament temper, if we imagine Isaiah's intervals of relief from political labour and religious reform occupied with an attention to individual interests, which necessarily would not obtain the permanent record of his public ministry. But whether this be so or not, the sixth chapter teaches that for Isaiah all public conscience and public labour found their necessary preparation in personal religion.

¶ The recognition of the infinite value of the individual soul is the explanation of the method by which Christianity spread in the world. Our Lord Himself and the apostles and evangelists whom He sent forth to carry on His work set themselves to the task of winning men one by one. It was never their way to endeavour to gain converts wholesale by political means. Their appeal was ever to the heart and conscience.

In the ministry of our Lord, nothing is more remarkable than the infinite pains which He took to help every soul which showed any readiness to respond to His influence. His dealing with individuals fills very large space in the Gospels. And in this dealing will be found the most extraordinary variety. No two

cases are alike. Each is perfectly individualized. Discerning, with a penetrating insight which was all His own, the needs and spiritual situation of every one, He adapted His treatment accordingly. What a multitude of instances of this Divine tact is to be found in those four little books which tell the story of His life, and how vividly each character stands out! Reflection will reveal the fact that this vivid portraiture is due in the main to our Lord's way of dealing with men. There was in Him, and in His mode of responding to the call of every heart, a power which drew forth the individuality of every human being with whom He came in contact. How true it is that our Lord not only gave a new preciousness to the human soul, teaching by precept and example that the lowliest is worth the expenditure of the most loving care or the most costly sacrifice, but that He also possesses, in Himself, an inherent power to draw forth the individuality of each one, making every soul who comes under His influence to be more real in relation to life and more truly himself than he was before.[1]

(2) But, again, *Isaiah had an Individual for his ideal.* To him the future was not only an established State; it was equally, it was first, a glorious King. At first only the rigorous virtues of the ruler are attributed to Him, but afterwards the graces and influence of a much broader and sweeter humanity. Indeed, in this latter oracle we saw that Isaiah spoke not so much of his great Hero as of what any individual might become. "A man," he says, "shall be as an hiding place from the wind." Personal influence is the spring of social progress, the shelter and fountain force of the community. In the following verses the effect of so pure and inspiring a presence is traced in the discrimination of individual character—each man standing out for what he is—which Isaiah defines as his second requisite for social progress. In all this there is much for the individual to ponder, much to inspire him with a sense of the value and responsibility of his own character, and with the certainty that by himself he shall be judged and by himself stand or fall. "The worthless person shall be no more called princely, nor the knave said to be bountiful."

¶ Isaiah was an Oriental. We moderns of the West place our reliance upon institutions; we go forward upon ideas. In the East it is personal influence that tells, persons who are expected, followed, and fought for. The history of the West is the history

[1] C. F. D'Arcy, *Christian Ethics and Modern Thought*, 56.

of the advance of thought, of the rise and decay of institutions, to which the greatest individuals are more or less subordinate. The history of the East is the annals of personalities; justice and energy in a ruler, not political principles, are what impress the Oriental imagination. Isaiah has carried this Oriental hope to a distinct and lofty pitch. The Hero whom he exalts on the margin of the future, as its Author, is not only a person of great majesty, but a character of considerable decision.[1]

(3) *Faith in God* is taught by Isaiah as it had never been taught before. It is a new note in prophecy, and the occasion of its proclamation by the prophet was the dramatic moment when he was confronted by the scheming politician Ahaz. Isaiah challenges the incredulous monarch, who relied more on the strong material support of Assyria than on the invisible might of Jehovah, and declared to him: "If ye will not believe, ye shall not abide secure." This faith in the Divine power and presence which shall protect and save His people was expressed in a name *Immanuel*, "God-with-us," and it may be regarded as the watchword of Isaiah's message to his countrymen at this dark moment of their fortunes, when the king trusted in Tiglath-pileser and the people resorted to the dark rites of necromancy and made "covenants with Sheol." This quiet "rest," this "refreshing," is compared to the waters of the Shiloah stream that go softly.

His views, it is true, have their limitations. The morality upon which he principally insists is that which concerns men's social relations; and he takes more account of the outward conduct, which can be enforced by authority, than of the inward motives. His doctrine of faith, too, seems to need some qualification. He lived in an age which had a very imperfect conception of the regularity marking God's mode of action in the physical world, and which believed Him to intervene continually in human affairs by direct interposition. This belief has been corrected by experience, which has shown that the Almighty, whilst influencing human minds immediately, normally works in nature through secondary causes and in accordance with general laws. Though He is not bound by the physical laws of which He is the Author, yet His processes and methods are ordinarily uniform, so that neither nations nor individuals, though engaged in a just cause,

[1] G. A. Smith, *The Book of Isaiah, i.-xxxix.*, 392.

can confidently look to God to defend them if they dispense with such means of self-defence as reason (which is His gift equally with conscience) may suggest. But although Isaiah's teaching thus requires to be qualified in certain directions, it will ever remain an invaluable protest against religious formalism and materialistic unbelief.

¶ Has it ever happened to you, on a beautiful autumn day, to sit down on some landing-place of one of our Jurassic mountains at the edge of the incline which descends almost perpendicularly into the plain below? The bottom of the immense space spread out under your feet was covered with a thick fog, which, like a cold winding-sheet, concealed from your eyes the lakes, fields, and villages. For some time your eyes fell sadly upon this misty abyss. Then suddenly they rose, as if instinctively, to seek some other object; and what was the sight now revealed to them? It was those silvered summits, terraced majestically in two or three stages one above another, which form the southern wall of our country, shining brightly above the sea of fog which enveloped the plain, like a heavenly apparition. And you could not take your eyes off this glorious picture, which no artist's pencil could reproduce. At the time when Isaiah prophesied, the immediate future of Israel lay dark before him. The moral decay was beginning. The eye of the prophet scanned with terror the rapidity of the descent, the violence and depth of the inevitable fall. But beyond and above this abyss of sin and of chastisement there shone out before his prophetic gaze a most glorious future, a double salvation. First, a temporary deliverance—the national restoration after the purifying judgment of the captivity; secondly—higher and more distant—the true, the eternal salvation, the reconciliation of Israel and of mankind with Heaven, the establishment of the Kingdom of God upon the whole earth, by means of the *holy remnant* which was to emerge from the crucible of chastisement.[1]

II.

Isaiah the Social Reformer.

Isaiah was brought up under the pre-Exilic sacrificial system, and may have continued in that all his life. But when he saw that the people were wont to depend upon sacrifices rather than

[1] F. Godet.

a clean moral life, then his denunciation broke out in strong words: "What is the multitude of your sacrifices to me? saith Jehovah: I am sated with burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and in the blood of bullocks and lambs and he-goats I take no pleasure. When you come to see my face, who required now at your hand to trample my courts [*i.e.*, with animals for sacrifice]? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; new moon and sabbath, the convoking of assemblies,—I cannot endure; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts are loathsome, they are a burden unto me, which I am weary of bearing." What God demands is rightly seen and clearly stated by the prophet: "Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do well; seek justice, relieve the oppressed, deal justly with the fatherless, plead for the widow." No sacrifice, no blood bath, can ever take the place of earnest moral endeavour. The prophet must take issue with his Church when he saw it sinking to an unworthy conception of God, as if His favours might be bought with blood.

¶ One of the greatest dangers to the Church of God, whether Jewish or Christian, is unreality. We cannot escape this grave peril by adopting a ritual, nor by dispensing with ritual, but only by the most persistent and strenuous moral efforts. This danger was present in Isaiah's day; it was one of the things which made the wide gulf between God and His chosen people: "This people draw near me, and with their mouth and with their lips honour me; but their heart is far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment of men learned by rote."

But there was another phase of the popular feeling, which was worse than unreality, worse than merely formal sacrifices, and that was the attempt to force the prophets either to keep silence or to conform their utterances to the wishes rather than the needs of the people. God pity the prophet of any age who must ask, not, What would the Lord have me say to my people? but, What will my people receive without offence? God pity the people who would not gladly hear the Lord's truth, even though it made them shake like reeds in the wind.[1]

¶ Oh for city reformers, for some Isaiah to take up the cry against the jerry-builder, against the rich monopolist who grinds the face of the poor, against the conscienceless companies caring

[1] L. W. Batten, *The Hebrew Prophet*, 292.

for nothing but big dividends, against the licensing authorities who grant licences to sell intoxicants by the score for the districts where the poor dwell, but refuse them at their own park gates, or near their own suburban residences, against the gambling lord, against the clergy and Nonconformist ministers who fill their purses with gold taken from big brewery companies. This is no time for smooth speech, for pretty compliments. We need men with some steel in their blood, of passionate speech and of sympathetic heart who will say, "No matter what becomes of me, I will speak for the oppressed, I will plead the cause of the poor, I will hearken to the cry of the widow." We need men with lofty civic ideals. Then "our sons shall be as plants grown up in their youth; and our daughters be as corner stones hewn after the fashion of a palace"; and no outcry "shall be heard in our streets."[1]

1. Isaiah's preaching was, first, a message of wrath, and then one of mercy. No man could preach wrath pure and simple. Wrath is but the background, to set in brighter light the mercy. Even repentance could not be preached, unless there were forgiveness: "Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." The prophet lets us very little into his own feelings; he is too strong and reserved to be garrulous about them. We know not with what mind he set himself to his task. He felt that it was his task, and he must speak. But his preaching was a preaching of wrath, in order to bring into operation mercy and love.

From Jehovah's attributes of righteousness and sovereignty, Isaiah concluded that He would punish Israel, the nation which was peculiarly His own, for its unrighteousness and mistrust; but he did not regard punishment as exhausting the Divine intentions towards it. The infliction of a severe chastisement was a necessary part of the Lord's purpose in respect of His people, for since in their conduct they did not honour Him as holy, He was bound to vindicate His holiness by a purifying judgment. Hence the efforts which they made, by compacts with infernal powers and by negotiations with foreign nations, to avert that judgment would avail them nothing; for the Lord's purpose was immutable. But Israel was not to be exterminated; when the judgment had removed out of it all the evil elements, a remnant of it would be delivered. Assyria, the implement of its punishment, would be

[1] S. Horton.

arrested, in the moment of its triumph, not by human but by Divine agency, and there would then follow for the chastened and repentant survivors an era of innocence, security, and happiness.

¶ It is not easy to say whether it is more difficult to preach wrath or love. For a sinner to preach God's wrath to sinners implies either very great earnestness or very great insensibility. Yet to preach God's mercy is a great step for a sinner to take, who has any adequate sense of what sin is. There is a superficial preaching of the love of God, which appears rather to come of sentiment. On the other hand, there is a preaching of the wrath of God that is equally unreal; not reposing on any profound feeling of His anger against sin, but due to coarseness of nature. Again, it is sometimes noticed that a man's preaching is the expression of a battle he is carrying on with himself; and he preaches the opposite of what he feels, because he is dissatisfied with his own feeling, and knows that he has not rightly realized that which is to be realized in the gospel. And thus some profoundly exercised men have preached peace and love, with a strenuousness and intensity which was a protest against their own condition of mind, which was destitute of peace, and without that sense of God's love which was felt to be rightly due.[1]

2. Isaiah's most characteristic doctrine is the idea of a judgment imminent upon the nation, accompanied by the preservation of a faithful Remnant, for whom a new and blissful era will then immediately begin. This doctrine is first adumbrated at the time of Isaiah's call: it is soon afterwards embodied by him in the name of his son, "Shear-jashub," *i.e.*, "a remnant shall return" (viz., to God); it appears subsequently under many different figures and in different contexts, and holds its place in his last recorded utterance (701 B.C.), chap. xxxvii. 31 f. The chosen nation is imperishable; but Divine justice requires that its unworthy members should be swept away: the rest, purged and renovated, will then form the foundation of a new community, exhibiting the *ideal* character of the people. The ideal is noble and attractively delineated by the prophet: he grasps it firmly, and constantly reverts to it. In the darkest times it is his consolation and support. The approach of trouble or danger throws

[1] A. B. Davidson, *The Called of God*, 203.

him back upon the thought of the permanence of the nation, and intensifies his faith in a blissful future reserved for it.

Here we have a fruitful idea which reappears, no doubt with essential modification, in St. Paul's conception of a spiritual Israel. Israel restored is still a nation with its old institutions, only its sin is purged and it has ideal rulers. "I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called The city of righteousness, the faithful city." Isaiah's writings abound in glowing pictures of the glorious day towards which events are ripening. The general conception is that of a new and final order of things, in which Zion, as the seat of God's kingdom of righteousness and peace, is the centre of light and blessing for the nations, and all nature becomes subservient to the needs of humanity. The representation includes features which are to our minds supernatural, although on the whole it may be said that nature is merely idealized, through its evils being eliminated and its beneficent powers indefinitely enhanced. The later pictures especially are bathed in an atmosphere of idyllic peace and happiness, the simple joys of rural life affording apparently to the aged prophet the best emblem of the perfect felicity reserved for the true people of Jehovah. For along with this line of thought there always goes the prophecy of a transformation of the national character. The evil-doer is rooted out of the community; the poor and afflicted rejoice in the Holy One of Israel; the spiritual blindness which was characteristic of the people is taken away; and the true knowledge of God is diffused through all ranks and classes of society. The blessings of Jehovah's government radiate from Israel to all the nations of the earth; "from Zion goes forth revelation, and the word of Jehovah from Jerusalem." It is noteworthy that here and elsewhere the nations are represented as retaining their political independence, and voluntarily submitting to the rule of Jehovah, whose just arbitrament supersedes war and brings in an era of universal peace. Finally it is to be remarked that this golden age is not conceived as a remote goal of history or as the result of a long development, but as the immediate sequel of the prophet's own age, following closely on the desolation caused by the Assyrian conquest. In the most brilliant of his Messianic visions Isaiah compares it to a great light break-

ing on the land, dissipating the darkness of the invasion, bringing victory and rejoicing and prosperity in its train.

¶ The feeling that Society is imperfect and capable of improvement has at various times prompted men to draw a picture of a better and happier community, an ideal commonwealth, or a race living a more tranquil life under more favourable conditions than ours. Sometimes the Utopia or ideal country is placed in a remote region of the earth, and introduced by the more or less transparent fiction of travel and discovery. Sometimes it is distant in time. It is projected into the future, or found in the supposed records of a remote past. In recent times the tendency has been to look forward to the distant future. . . . With the Greeks, the opposite tendency is more conspicuous. Plato's Atlantis is an island that once existed in the sea beyond the Pillars of Hercules, but is now submerged. The "Golden Age" of ancient poets is a primeval age of innocence and bliss. The modern man looks in one direction, the Greek in another. Why this contrast should exist, if it does exist, it would be difficult to say. Some probable causes of it may be suggested. Rapid progress in mechanical science, the conquest of steam and electricity, has prompted the thought of further advance. With deeper moral feelings or ideas there has come a greater dissatisfaction with the actual world, a stronger desire for progress, and with that, it may be, a greater reluctance to contemplate the idea that things are worse than they once were. At the same time, Ethics and Anthropology have brought us to a clearer conception of primitive man and of early stages of civilization. The idea of a past Golden Age rests to some extent on a fallacy. Go backwards, undo what has been done: take away the vices of civilization, and the virtues will be left. We know now that the virtues would not be left, and were not there. The vices and virtues grow up together, and by going back we arrive, not at what is highly moral, but at what is crude, half-conscious, and non-moral.[1]

3. No reason forbids us to believe that Isaiah pictured his ideal State as subject to an ideal King, or, as we are accustomed to say, a Messiah. As men gird themselves for their work, so will this ideal King gird himself with righteousness: he will judge according to the truth: he will defend the cause of the poor. As a "wonderful counsellor" he will form his plans, carry them out as a "Divine hero" or conqueror; he will divide the booty and bring in lasting peace.

[1] W. R. Hardie, *Lectures on Classical Subjects*, 102.

The origin of the Messianic hope in the mind of the Jewish race is wrapped in obscurity. If the Psalm for Solomon (lxxii.) belongs to the era to which it is attributed, there is evidence that the advent of a greater Prince than he had already become a national expectation. The strong probability, however, that the hope was born not in the sunshine, but in the dark shadow of national adversity and threatened collapse, cannot fail to impress itself on thoughtful minds. Israel wanted not, dreamed not of, a greater than Solomon while his glorious reign continued. When such a puppet of Asshur as Ahaz sat upon his throne, and the very existence of the State was in jeopardy, the thought of God's Anointed, "a King in his beauty," to resuscitate and redeem her falling fortunes, would naturally occur to a mind like that of Isaiah, God-intoxicated and inspired with passionate patriotism as it was. At such a crisis as had befallen, the vision of the Prince with the four glorious names is at once natural and intelligible:

"Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given;
And the government shall be upon his shoulder:
And his name shall be called Wonderful-Counsellor,
Mighty One for God, abiding Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of his government and of peace
There shall be no end."

In the early years of his ministry, whilst the memory of the Divine call was still fresh, Isaiah met Ahaz terrified at the joint invasion of Judah by the kings of Israel and Syria. Scornfully calling these rulers "the two fag-ends of smoking logs," all but burnt out, with no more power to hurt than a charred stick, he called on the descendant of David to trust in Jehovah alone. With hypocritical excuses the king put off the prophet, resolved already that in an Assyrian alliance alone lay any hope of deliverance. As Isaiah turned indignantly away there broke in upon his soul the great hope of a brighter future. In the near future should be born a Child whose glorious name should be Immanu-el —with us is God. In his youth he should suffer privations. In a land desolated by war he must live on the plain fare of a nomad, "curds and honey shall he eat." But his presence with the people should be the pledge of God's protection; all the plots of their enemies must fail.

"Rage, ye peoples, and be dumbfounded;
And hearken, all distant parts of the earth:
Gird yourselves, and be dumbfounded;
Gird yourselves, and be dumbfounded.
Plan a plan that it may be destroyed;
Declare your purpose that it may not stand:
For—Immanu-el (with—us—is—God)."

The hope in a coming King, just as the hope in a coming "Day," formed part of those deep-rooted human longings which were present in many different peoples, and which contained truths which the future was bound to justify. Neither Isaiah nor any other man of his period could cut himself loose from his environment, and build a future altogether out of relation to the present. Isaiah looks away beyond these weak and spiritless kings, and dreams of the strong Man who is to come, the Man who in his Godlike force of character shall be "as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." It is therefore possible to hold with the utmost confidence that this picture of the King to come formed the loftiest vision which Isaiah saw. It was the necessary completion of his earlier teaching about the inviolable City and the purged Remnant. Its absence would have been far more astonishing than its presence.

¶ The term Messianic Prophecy strictly refers to the predictions in the Old Testament of a Messiah, that is of an ideal King of Israel, though the Old Testament does not use this term to describe him; but it is also employed in a wider sense, embracing the forecast of the golden age from which the figure of the ideal monarch is frequently absent. . . . It is with Isaiah that the figure of the Messianic King first makes its appearance in two great passages, Is. ix. 1–7 and xi. 1–9. Their genuineness has been keenly disputed in recent years, but apart from the silence about them in later Prophets there is no really strong argument against it, while the passages, both in what they say and in what they omit, point more plainly to the pre-Exilic than to the post-Exilic period. It is difficult, however, to say precisely to what period of Isaiah's career they should be assigned, and in any case we must not overrate the importance of this element in his forecast of the future.[1]

[1] A. S. Peake, in *Lux Hominum*, 45.

¶ In the Old Testament "the Lord's anointed" is a synonym for "the king"; and in poetical passages the two stand in parallelism, as Psalm xviii. 50:

> "Great deliverance giveth he to his king;
> And sheweth mercy to his anointed."

The king was called "the anointed" because at his coronation the sacred oil was poured upon his head, by which he was consecrated to his office. This oil was a symbol of the Spirit of God, from whom the young monarch was supposed to receive the wisdom, dignity, and other gifts necessary for the discharge of his functions; as is beautifully brought out in Isaiah xi. 1–4. This perfect description of a king, although it does not contain the name "Messiah," had a great deal to do with shaping the meaning ultimately attached to the term, which was that of an ideal king, who should embody in himself all the attributes and achievements proper to the kingly office and thereby conduct the nation to the full realization of its destiny.

For this ideal personage the title "Messiah" is already used in the Second Psalm, though not elsewhere in the Old Testament; in the post-canonical writings of the Jews there occur more frequent instances of its use in this sense; and in our Lord's time "the Messiah" was the regular term for the expected deliverer, as is manifest from the pages of the Gospels.[1]

III.

Isaiah the Political Counsellor.

After the rise of the second Assyrian Empire and the changed conditions it introduced into the politics of Western Asia, three parties formed themselves in Judah, each of which directed in succession the affairs of the kingdom. The pressure of the Syro-Ephraimitic war created the Assyrian party, and led to its predominance throughout the reign of Ahaz. The overthrow of Samaria, which brought Judah and Assyria into immediate contact, as well as the growing fear of the power of Nineveh, caused this party to fall with the death of the king. Hezekiah and his advisers now threw themselves into the hands of the Egyptian party, whose leader we may see in Shebna. Its in-

[1] J. Stalker, *The Christology of Jesus*, 129.

fluence was marked by revolt from Assyria, by alliance with Egypt, and by attempts to create a league against the Assyrians among the neighbouring states. The cities of the Philistines, forming as they did a link between Egypt and Judah, assumed increased importance; the old suzerainty which the Jewish kings claimed over them was asserted more forcibly than before, and their princes were made and unmade in accordance with the dictates of Jewish policy. The defeat of Tirhakah at Eltekeh shattered the power of the Egyptian party; Shebna was succeeded as vizier by Eliakim, and the views and teachings of Isaiah were at last allowed to prevail. For the rest of Hezekiah's life Isaiah was his political as well as his religious counsellor; the lesson taught by the terrible invasion of Sennacherib was never forgotten. And though with the death of Hezekiah evil days came again upon Judah—days which, we may gather, Isaiah was privileged never to see—the effect of the prophet's policy continued to be felt. The house of David and the national existence of the people over whom it ruled were preserved until a new king arose in Assyria and inaugurated new principles of government. The Temple and the kingdom were saved till the time was ripe for the chosen people to pass through the fiery ordeal of the Babylonian Exile.

1. Isaiah now appears before us in an entirely new character, that, namely, of a political adviser. In order to appreciate the importance of this fact we have only to look at the contrast which in this respect he presents to Amos and Hosea in the North. These prophets held the same fundamental convictions as Isaiah; they looked forward to a blessed future for Israel after the work of judgment was completed; yet their writings contain no hint of political direction for the leaders of the State. They take up a negative attitude towards the problems of statesmanship; and it must have seemed that the breach between Jehovah and His people was so absolute that no guidance or counsel could be obtained through the medium of the prophetic word. Now it is one of Isaiah's chief distinctions that he revived this political function of prophecy, which had been in abeyance since the time of Elisha. Without descending from the high spiritual level to which prophecy had been raised by the work of Amos and Hosea, he was able from that standpoint to formulate a definite religious

policy by which the nation might be safely guided through the dangers that lay immediately before it.

¶ Mr. Bernard Shaw once complained to me that though the two subjects in which people are most of all interested are religion and politics, the stage is disabled from treating them, and therefore has to rely upon subjects of secondary interest to hold the public support. He is quite right as to the supreme place which these two subjects occupy in the general mind. Shallow critics are found to say that the Church should interest itself in religion and not in politics. The distinction is, of course, quite impossible. You may as well try to divorce religion from morals as from politics. Unless the well-being of the commonwealth is a matter of no concern to the Churches, they are bound to follow the trend of political movements with a most watchful eye; and from time to time intervene clearly and decisively. Let any one consider the great outstanding problems of our time, international arbitration, the reduction of armaments, disestablishment, education, temperance and licensing reform, housing, poor law reform, divorce; and those two questions which are greater than any other: the congested city and the deserted village. Who will say that the Church ought to be prepared to say nothing at all about these matters? Who will say that religion can even continue to exist among us if she do not bring her inspiration to bear upon such problems as these? I can understand the attitude of a consistent Plymouth Brother who says that Churches are false to their principles if they intervene to destroy the slave system, or to establish democratic government, or any other great end which has been sacrificially ensued by such Churches as my own. But what I cannot understand is the attitude of those who boast of the achievements of religion in the sphere of politics in bygone days, but who would have us believe now that there is something sinister in this association. They are as hopeless as the other good people who like to hear their minister expatiate on the evils of the Roman Empire, or the French Revolution, or even on the sins against freedom of modern Russia and Turkey, but who will not permit him to say a single word against their own social and national sins, because that would be talking politics. No Church that laid down such conditions for its ministry would deserve to have men of free and independent spirit in its ranks.[1]

2. Isaiah realized in anticipation the noble ideal of a single-hearted statesman sketched four centuries afterwards by the

[1] C. Silvester Horne, *Pulpit, Platform, and Parliament*, 71.

Athenian patriot Demosthenes: "to discern events in their beginnings, to be beforehand in the detection of movements and tendencies, and to forewarn his countrymen accordingly; to fight against the political vices, from which no State is free, of procrastination, supineness, ignorance, and party-jealousy; to impress upon all the paramount importance of unity and friendly feeling, and the duty of providing promptly for their country's needs." This was his ideal: and how strenuously he sought to be true to it his whole career attests. Regarded practically, the views which he advocated were clear, consistent, and sound. The circumstances of the age threatened to entangle Judah with foreign powers, and Isaiah lays down the principles by which her action should be guided. In the panic caused by the Syro-Ephraimitic invasion, Isaiah alone (so far as appears) retained the power of sober reflection, estimated the danger at its just proportions, and saw that no stress of circumstances could justify the abandonment of principle, or neutralize the consequences in case it should be resorted to. Isaiah, then, discountenanced the application to Assyria; when, however, it was made, and the Assyrian protectorate had become a *fait accompli*, he acquiesced; and all his efforts were directed towards averting a rupture. From the first he saw the hollowness of Egyptian promises; and it was doubtless owing chiefly to his exertions and influence that the alliance with Egypt was deferred for so many years. The soundness of his judgment was shown by the event. Again and again, when it came to a contest of strength, Egypt was defeated by Assyria; neither to Samaria, nor to the Philistines, nor to Judah, did she render any effectual aid; and Jerusalem was rescued from destruction only by an occurrence which could not have been calculated upon, and which was the termination of a crisis that (so far as we can judge) would itself not have arisen had Isaiah's counsels been listened to.

3. There is not the least reason to believe that the prophet ever entertained a hope that, by following the course he recommended, Judah might be spared the crowning disaster of an Assyrian invasion. That great act of judgment was irrevocably decreed by Jehovah, and could not be finally averted by any line of policy however prudent or even religious it might be. Isaiah's purpose was simply to secure that *when* the judgment came its salutary

effects might be experienced by as large a section of the nation as possible; and with this ultimate object in view he counselled a patient acceptance of the irksome political situation in which Judah was placed, and above all an attitude of neutrality in the repeated struggles which were made by the surrounding nations against Assyria.

This of course was on the surface a very different line of action from that which he urged on Ahaz in the year 735; but each was founded on the one fundamental principle by which Isaiah's statesmanship was governed. Then, he sought to prevent Ahaz from entering into an alliance with Tiglath-pileser, involving a dishonourable subjection to the Assyrian Empire. Now, under Hezekiah, he sets his face against all schemes for violating that compact by an alliance with Egypt or any other country opposed to Assyria. But the religious motive in each case was his antipathy to the spirit of unbelief which he discovered in all attempts to effect political salvation by human wisdom and the help of heathen states.

¶ To trust God for protection is to wait under discouragements and disappointments for a desired issue of the affairs we commit to Him. "He that believeth will not make haste." This the Lord pleads for. Men will have their desires precisely accomplished this year, this month, this week, or they will wait no longer. These, says God, are proud men; their hearts are lifted up in them; they trust not to me for protection. Men love to trust God (as they profess) for what they have in their hands, in possession, or what lies in an easy view; place their desires afar off, carry their accomplishment behind the clouds out of their sight, interpose difficulties and perplexities—their hearts are instantly sick. They cannot wait for God; they do not trust Him, nor ever did. Would you have the presence of God with you? Learn to wait quietly for the salvation you expect from Him. Then, indeed, is He glorified, when He is trusted as in a storm.[1]

[1] John Owen.

ISAIAH.

III.

DEUTERO-ISAIAH.

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Deutero-Isaiah.

Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.—Is. xl. 1.

1. When Dean Stanley published his Lectures on the Jewish Church, it required some hardihood even to suggest a separate authorship for the later chapters of the Book of Isaiah. In the present day, however, a division of the book at the end of the thirty-ninth chapter is generally recognized, and "Deutero-Isaiah" is a familiar name. The term is applied indifferently to the later part of the book itself (xl.–lxvi.) and to its supposed author. It is not intended to mean that the latter actually bore the name of Isaiah. Who or what the author was we do not know. His self-effacement in his prophecies is as remarkable as it is complete. In recent times he has often been called "The great Prophet of the Exile," and, more generally, "The Evangelical Prophet."

2. The accumulated reasons for the division are overwhelming. It will be enough, by way of introduction, to mention three general considerations which, though quite simple and obvious, are by themselves conclusive.

(1) Had Isaiah spoken of Cyrus's career a hundred and fifty years before the event, he must inevitably have used the language of prediction, as he did about the much nearer event (as he supposed) of the Messiah's reign. But the author of chapters xl.–lxvi. takes Cyrus for granted, as a figure too well known to himself and his readers to need introduction; and his predictions about him refer only to particular acts, such as the conquest of Babylon and the restoration of the Jewish exiles. It is inconceivable that any but a contemporary of Cyrus should have written about him in this manner.

(2) To Isaiah, Jerusalem is the scene of action which is always assumed, and the centre of interest. Deutero-Isaiah does not

write of Jerusalem as one to whom it is familiar. For him Zion is a distant, an ideal, figure; an object of pity, reverence, and hope, but not of everyday knowledge. Babylon is the centre of the world which he knows best. His point of view is that of an exile living, not in Babylon, but among the "nations" which are falling under the sway of Cyrus.

(3) Even more striking is the contrast between the attitudes of the two prophets towards their own countrymen. From first to last Isaiah of Jerusalem denounces the sins of Israel, and foretells the coming doom. No saying of his is more characteristic than one of the latest: "If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: but if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword." It is like passing into a new world to read the opening words of Deutero-Isaiah, which are no less characteristic of their author: "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem." The same contrast will be found to exist between whole poems. When we compare, for instance, the prophet's relentless march from threat to threat, which lends a lurid gloom to the ninth and tenth chapters, with the unqualified pity and unconditional promises of the fifty-first, it seems little short of amazing that writings so different in tone and in substance were ever attributed to the same author.[1]

¶ The reason why these later chapters came to be attached to the Book of Isaiah may be that some owner of a manuscript of Isaiah proper (and in ancient times there were generally very few copies of any book) found it convenient to fasten together other different MSS. or fragments of MSS. to prevent their getting lost. There is probably a similar instance of attached prophecies in Zech. ix.–xiv., and perhaps Malachi. Or, on the other hand, it may be that the editor of the whole book saw the appropriateness of connecting with Isaiah's prophecies concerning an Exile (v. 13; vi. 11; xxxix. 6, 7) and a Return (x. 22; xi. 10–16; xxvii. 12, 13; cf. xiv. 1, 2), concerning the Fall of Babylon (xxi. 1–10; cf. xiii.–xiv. 23) and the Gathering of the Gentiles to worship Jehovah (ii. 1–4; xi. 10; xix. 18–25), these later anonymous prophecies on similar subjects, which were thought to be, and indeed largely were, on the eve of actual fulfilment. Moreover, this view of the deliberate and intentional connexion of the two parts of the book might appear the more reasonable if we reflect that Isaiah, unlike

[1] M. G. Glazebrook.

Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and possibly even the Deutero-Isaiah, had probably not arranged his own prophecies in the order in which we find them.[1]

I.

The Situation.

If the great prophecy of Israel's redemption and glorification now included in the Book of Isaiah had come down to us as an independent and anonymous document, no reasonable doubt could have been entertained as to the time at which it was written. Internal evidence would be regarded as fixing its date with remarkable precision towards the close of the Babylonian Exile.

Israel is in exile. Jehovah has surrendered His people to their enemies. They are suffering the punishment of their sins. They are being tried in the furnace of affliction. Jerusalem has drunk to the dregs the cup of Jehovah's fury. The daughter of Zion lies prostrate in the dust as a mourner; the chains of her captivity are about her neck. The mother city of Zion is a barren exile, bereaved of her children, and wandering to and fro. Her children are scattered from their home. Jehovah's wife is divorced from Him, and her children are sold into slavery for their iniquities. Jerusalem itself is in ruins; the cities of Judah are deserted; the land is desolate; the Temple is a heap of ashes. The situation is summed up in the pathetic words: "Thy holy cities are become a wilderness, Zion is become a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. Our holy and our beautiful house, where our fathers praised thee, is burned with fire; and all our pleasant things are laid waste." Babylon is the scene of Israel's captivity. Babylon is the oppressor who holds Zion's children in thrall. Babylon has been the agent in executing Jehovah's judgment, and she has performed her task with a malicious pleasure. The Exile has already lasted long. It seems to have become permanent. Zion fancies herself forgotten and forsaken. Jehovah sleeps. His wonderful works of old time are a memory and tradition only. Deliverance from the tyrant's iron grasp seems hopeless. The centuries during which Israel possessed its land are fading

[1] F. H. Woods and F. E. Powell, *The Hebrew Prophets*, iii. 207.

into a mere moment in the remoteness of the past. The weary decades of exile are lengthening out into an eternity of punishment. Faith and hope are strained to the point of breaking. But deliverance is at hand. Jerusalem's servitude is accomplished; satisfaction has been made for her iniquity. The decree has gone forth for pardon, redemption, restoration.

1. In order to understand the prophecy, it will be necessary to sketch in outline the course of history, in so far as it affected Judah, since the period of Isaiah's lifetime.

Sennacherib was succeeded in 681 by Esarhaddon; Esarhaddon by Asshurbanipal in 668, under whose reign of forty-three years the literature and art of ancient Assyria reached their greatest perfection. But after the death of Asshurbanipal in 626, Assyria rapidly declined: in 625 the great rival of Nineveh, Babylon, through the enterprise of Nabopolassar, emerged finally from dependence; and in or about 607 Nabopolassar, allying with the Medes under Cyaxares, laid the proud capital of Sargon and Sennacherib in ruins. The supremacy exercised hitherto by Assyria now passed to Babylon, and was retained by it till 538. Nabopolassar was succeeded by Nebuchadnezzar (606–561), who greatly strengthened and extended the Babylonian Empire, and beautified and largely rebuilt his capital, Babylon. In the history of Judah, the great turning-point was *Jehoiakim's fourth year*, 604 B.C., the year in which Nebuchadnezzar won his decisive victory over Egypt at Carchemish, on the upper course of the Euphrates. After submitting to the Chaldæans for three years, Jehoiakim rebelled. The Jews went into exile in two detachments: the flower of the nation (including, amongst others, the prophet Ezekiel), under Jehoiakim's son, Jehoiachin, in 599; the rest, after the revolt of Zedekiah, in 588, when the city was taken and the Temple burnt, and its vessels were carried away to Babylon.

¶ The exiles must have formed a considerable community in Babylonia. The texts which speak of the numbers of those carried into captivity (2 Kings xxiv. 14–16; Jer. lii. 28–30) are indeed imperfect, and apparently also in some disorder; but that they formed a numerous body is evident from the fact that upwards of forty-two thousand males, irrespective of women and dependants, returned with Zerubbabel (Ezra ii. 2, 64 f.), and many, as we know, remained behind. In a community as large as

this the life and society of Judah would in great measure be perpetuated; some kind of organization would be needed; and the moral and religious condition of the exiles would be substantially what it had been in the closing years of the monarchy. Thus Ezekiel refers to the "elders" in exile with him as still forming a distinct class (viii. 1, xiv. 1, xx. 1), and alludes to the idolatrous tendencies still prevalent in their midst (xx. 38, 39). At first the exiles were unsettled by prophets, who raised their hopes by delusive promises of a speedy return to Palestine: Jeremiah shortly after 599 addresses to them a letter (chap. xxix.), in which he assures them that the seventy years of Babylonian dominion must expire before their hopes can be realized, and exhorts them to rest satisfied meanwhile with their condition, to "build houses and dwell in them, and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them," in the land of their captivity. Circumstances left the exiles no option but to follow the advice of Jeremiah; and many, in consequence, grew so attached to their new home, that when, sixty years afterwards, permission was granted to leave it, they did not care to avail themselves of it.[1]

2. The external history of the Babylonian Empire from its destruction of Jerusalem to its own overthrow by Cyrus can be summarized briefly. Nebuchadnezzar, upon the conclusion of the war against Judah, attacked Tyre (585), which had been one of the States that encouraged Zedekiah in his rebellion. The siege lasted thirteen years, and ended without the city being captured. He next invaded Egypt (567), and penetrated into it, but does not appear to have effectively subjugated the country. He was succeeded in 561 by Amilmarduk (the Evil-merodach of the Old Testament). This king displayed clemency to the captive Jehoiachin by releasing him from prison; but little else is recorded of him, and he died by violence after a reign of only two years. The author of his death was Nergal-shar-usar (Neriglissar), who succeeded him, and whose reign was also short. He was followed by Labashi-marduk (Labassarachos), a youth who was murdered after occupying the throne for less than a year. His successor was Nabunaid (Nabonidus) (556–538), who was more interested in the building of temples than in the cares of empire, and who left the administration of the State largely in the hands of his son Bel-shar-usar (the Belshazzar of the Old

[1] S. R. Driver, *Isaiah: His Life and Times*, 135.

Testament). Early in his reign the Manda, who had been instrumental in the overthrow of Assyria, and who had subjugated, and become amalgamated with, the Medes, had been conquered by Cyrus, the ruler of Anshan (a little State in N.W. Elam), their king Astyages being betrayed by his own troops (549). After this success Cyrus, who now called himself king of the Parsu (or Persians), conquered Crœsus of Lydia and captured Sardis (546); and he then menaced Babylon. He advanced upon it in 538 and entered it without resistance, Nabunaid being taken within his capital. Thus Babylon fell, some fifty years after it had brought about the fall of Jerusalem, so fulfilling the prophecy of Jeremiah delivered sixty-six years previously (Jer. xxv. 12).

3. We thus see how great is the difference in historical standpoint between Isaiah and Deutero-Isaiah. Isaiah wrote in the latter half of the eighth century B.C., during the period of Assyrian ascendancy, when Shalmaneser, Sargon, and Sennacherib were threatening or attacking Israel, Judah, and other small Syrian States. By far the greater number of his prophecies have therefore a direct or indirect bearing on the relation between Judah and Assyria. On the other hand, the standpoint of at least the greater part of Deutero-Isaiah is the Babylonian Exile, which, begun by Nebuchadnezzar, was now nearing its end in the reign of Nabonidus, the last of the kings of Chaldæa. The precise moment at which the prophecy opens cannot be determined; but it must, in any case, have been prior to 538, and, as xli. 25 implies a date subsequent to the union of the Medes with the Persians in 549, it will be limited to the interval between these years, during which Cyrus was pursuing his career of conquest in the north and north-west of Asia. The prophet's eye marks him in the distance as the coming deliverer of his nation: he stimulates the flagging courage of his people by pointing to his successes, and declares that he is God's appointed agent both for the overthrow of the Babylonian Empire and for the restoration of the chosen people to Palestine.

4. The place of writing can hardly have been other than Babylonia. The prophet speaks in the presence of a dominant heathenism. Idolatry in all its grossness and folly surrounds

him. He has watched the infatuated idolaters carrying their helpless gods in solemn procession; he has seen these contemptible idols manufactured, and set up in the temples; he has watched their besotted worshippers at their vain devotions. All this points naturally to Babylonia; and when we find the prophet in closest touch and sympathy with the exiles there; when we observe how fully acquainted he is with their circumstances, their character, their sins, their hopes, their fears, the impression is confirmed; and when we note how the prophet unites himself with those exiles in confession, thanksgiving, and earnest pleading, we can scarcely doubt that he was himself one of them.

II.

The Theology.

As in the case of the prophets generally, the author's attitude and teaching, viewed in their broader features, are determined by his historical situation. Like Isaiah in 701, like Jeremiah on the eve of the Exile, he stands at a critical moment in the history of his nation. Was Judah to lose its individuality in the land of its exile, to be gradually assimilated, like its brethren of the Ten Tribes, to the nations among whom it dwelt? There were many among the exiles upon whom the promise of Jeremiah had produced no impression, who were content to remain where they were, who had no high aspirations for the future; others, who were ready to quit Babylon if the opportunity should offer, were despondent, over-awed by the power and magnificence of the great imperial city. The prophet saw the future with a truer eye. Though Cyrus, pursuing his triumphal progress, may throw the nations of Asia into consternation, and drive them in terror to their idol-gods, Israel has no ground for alarm; the promise has been given, and cannot be recalled; Israel must yet return to its ancient home, and complete the destined cycle of its history. The approaching restoration from exile holds in his view a similar position to that occupied in Isaiah by the triumph over the Assyrians. It marks the beginning of a new epoch, in which the powers of the world and of evil, now holding sway over Israel, will be rendered harmless; it inaugurates the advent of the

perfect Kingdom of God. Hence the importance assumed by it in the prophet's eyes, and the brilliant colours in which he depicts it. It is a manifestation of the Divine glory; it is an event of world-wide significance, to be told, and acknowledged gratefully, in the remotest regions of the earth. But he stands upon a loftier pedestal than Isaiah, and pierces further into the future. He has a more distinct consciousness of the greatness of Israel's mission; he is aware that, in some mysterious way, a "light of the Gentiles" is in the future to proceed from it; he has received, in even larger and fuller measure than Isaiah, a revelation of God's purposes of grace. Hence the extraordinary comprehensiveness of his view, and the wealth and richness of his prophetic teaching. In the words of A. B. Davidson, "No thought is too lofty or too wide for the Prophet, in the passion of enthusiasm which the vision of a restored nature and regenerated world raises within him."

1. The first requisite was to revive the exiles' consciousness of God, to impress them with a sense of His infinite power and resources, and the immutability of His word; and also to impart to them a new and inspiring view of their own mission and destiny as a nation. And to this task the writer addresses himself with all the impassioned and persuasive eloquence of which he is an unrivalled master. The prophet's doctrine of God is, accordingly, the fundamental element of his teaching. The book, it has been well said, "is a structure based upon and built out of the monotheistic conception, the idea that Jehovah, God of Israel, is the true and only God." The author does not differ from earlier prophets in being a monotheist, but he differs remarkably in this, that he inculcates the principle almost as an abstract truth of religion, and strives to bring it home to the reason and the imagination of his readers.

2. The contrast between the transitory impotence of man and the eternal omnipotence of Jehovah is the next point that he emphasizes. In face of the apparently invincible might of Babylon, deliverance must have seemed hopeless to the exiles. But at the very outset of his prophecy he proclaims this contrast for Israel's comfort. When the mysterious voice has announced

the impending restoration of Israel, another voice bids him "Cry," and when he asks "What shall I cry?" he receives the answer: "All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: the grass withereth, the flower fadeth; because the breath of Jehovah bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever." It is the thought upon which the Israelites are to reflect in view of all the overwhelming magnificence and power of their conquerors, which seems for the moment so irresistible and so permanent.

¶ Have frequent thoughts of *God's omnipotency*, or His almighty power. This most men, it may be, suppose they need not much exhortation unto; for none ever doubted of it. Who doth not grant it on all occasions? Men grant it, indeed, in general; for eternal power is inseparable from the first notion of the Divine Being. So are they conjoined by the apostle: "His eternal power and Godhead." Yet few believe it for themselves and as they ought. Indeed, to believe the almighty power of God with reference unto ourselves and all our concernments, temporal and eternal, is one of the highest and most noble acts of faith, which includes all others in it; for this is that which God at first proposed alone as the proper object of our faith in our entrance into covenant with Him, "I am the Almighty God"; that which Job arrived unto after his long exercise and trial. "I know," saith he, "that thou canst do every thing, and no thought of thine can be hindered." "God hath spoken once," saith the psalmist; "twice have I heard this; that power belongeth unto God." It was that which God saw it necessary frequently to instruct him in; for we are ready to be affected with the appearances of *present power* in creatures, and to suppose that all things will go according unto their wills because of their power. But it is quite otherwise; all creatures are poor feeble ciphers that can do nothing. Power belongs unto God; it is a flower of His crown imperial, which He will suffer none to usurp.[1]

3. In dealing with God's relation to *man*, the prophet lays unusual stress upon the motives by which He acts, and the principles exemplified in His actions—the latter being not merely described but referred to the motive or principle from which they spring. Thus, as one such principle, *justice* is emphasized: the path of Cyrus, the commission of Israel, or of the ideal

[1] John Owen, *Of Spiritual Mindedness*, chap. ix.

Servant, are, by the use of this term, exhibited in the light of a manifestation or furtherance of God's righteous purpose. Similarly, *righteousness* is often specified as the principle determining the approaching deliverance. Another motive of Jehovah's action is the *Divine name*: being jealous of His honour, He cannot any longer permit His name to be reproached, or the glory which is His due to be transferred to idol gods, by the nation which He has chosen to be His own people remaining permanently in exile.

He lays emphasis especially on God's righteousness. It is the quality displayed in the raising up of Cyrus, in the sustaining of Israel, which is ascribed to Jehovah's "right hand of righteousness," and in the calling of the ideal Servant of the Lord. But, further, it is exhibited in Jehovah's manner of revealing Himself; He is One who "speaks righteousness"; One who, in contrast with the false gods, is approved as righteous by the verification of His prophecies; a word goes forth from His mouth in righteousness and shall not return. The general idea suggested by these various usages is perhaps trustworthiness in word and deed, and particularly in the perfect correspondence between word and deed. This implies that Jehovah's actions are all regulated by a consistent and firmly maintained principle, so that when He speaks He but reveals the inner principle which is the true motive of His action; and when He is said to uphold Israel or to raise up Cyrus "in righteousness" the meaning is that He does so in pursuance of a steadfast purpose which He may be relied on to carry through. And since His purpose is ultimately a purpose of salvation, we can understand why so frequently in the prophecy the idea of righteousness tends to become merged in that of salvation.

¶ The Hebrew term for righteousness denotes that which is perfectly straight. The Greek is that which divides equally to all, apportions to every one his due, whilst the Latin means that which is commanded. The thought expressed by the Hebrew root is deeper than that which is conveyed by either the Latin or the Greek. The Romans were a military people, a nation of soldiers, and the idea of righteousness in their minds was naturally associated with that of obedience to orders. The Greeks were a people foremost in all that ministers to social enjoyment and civilization, and their idea of righteousness was that which accorded to each the possession of his due. The thought of an antecedent and eternal distinction between right and wrong, as a straight line

drawn from earth to Heaven, apart from the present results of good and evil, runs through the whole system of Old Testament morality, and that thought is graphically represented under the image of that which is perfectly straight. According to Euclid, a straight line is the shortest which can be drawn from one point to another, and in the Jewish tongue Righteousness is the most direct path towards the Great White Throne. So we find that the usual word for sinning—*Kha-tâ*—means not only that of missing the mark, as generally taken, but also of swerving from this straight line, and thereby making so much the longer the sinner's journey towards the goal and aim of his existence.[1]

III.

The Conception of the Servant.

One feature of the theology of Deutero-Isaiah demands fuller consideration. The figure of the "Servant of Jehovah" is as conspicuous in his prophecy as is the figure of the Messianic king in Isaiah. What, then, does the prophet mean by this term? What does the figure denoted by it represent to him? What attributes or functions does he associate with it? The term itself denotes in general one who is God's agent or representative, and who is loyal and devoted, according to the knowledge possessed by him, in the discharge of the work entrusted to him. It is thus applied to many different persons, as Abraham (Gen. xxvi. 24), Moses (Num. xii. 7), Caleb (*ib.* xiv. 24), Joshua (Judg. ii. 8), David (2 Sam. vii. 8), Isaiah (Is. xx. 3), Eliakim (Is. xxii. 20), Job (Job i. 8), the prophets generally (Amos iii. 7 and frequently), even to a heathen, as Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. xxv. 9, xliii. 10). In the present prophecy, however, the application of the term is peculiar; and is it not easy to form a perfectly consistent picture of the idea expressed by it. Let us be guided in our endeavour by the hints which the author himself affords us.

1. It is reasonable to seek the origin of the idea in the first passage in which the term occurs, xli. 8–10: "But thou, Israel, *my servant*, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham, who loved me; thou whom I have taken hold of from the ends of the

[1] W. H. Saulez, *The Romance of the Hebrew Language*, 29.

earth, and called thee from the corners thereof, and said unto thee, *Thou art my servant*, I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away; fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God." Here there can be no doubt as to what the term denotes. It denotes the *Israelite nation*, treated, however, not as the mere aggregate of the members composing it, but as a *unity*, developing historically, and maintaining its continuity and essential character through successive generations. The nation is viewed by the prophet as a single individual, called by God in the distant past, honoured by Him with the title implying that it is His organ or representative upon earth, and now exiled in Babylon. Again, in xlv. 4, Cyrus is addressed in these words: "For Jacob *my servant's* sake, and Israel my chosen, I have called thee by thy name: I have titled thee, when thou hast not known me." Here, not less plainly, the term denotes equally the *nation*, exiled at present in Babylon, and shortly to be released by Cyrus. The application is the same in xliii. 10; xliv. 1–2, 21; xlviii. 20. In all these passages the term is a designation of Israel, the nation being regarded as an individual whose birth (xliv. 2: "Thus saith Jehovah that made thee, and *formed thee from the womb*") coincides with its first appearance amongst other nations, whose ideal character ("my servant") corresponds with the design (Gen. xviii. 19 R.V.) stamped upon the nation's history, and whose life represents its subsequent experiences. The nation being thus grasped as an individual, it follows from the continuity of the national life that the term may be applied equally to denote it in every stage of its history. Thus in xlii. 18, 19 we read: "Hear, ye deaf; and look, ye blind, that ye may see. Who is blind, but *my servant*? or deaf, as my messenger that I send?" Here, as before, the term "my servant" denotes the nation; but the prophet for the moment thinks only of the masses whom he sees around him, heedless of Israel's mission and unconscious of its future destiny; these at the time represent the nation in his eyes, and elicit from him accordingly the language of reproof. In the other passages that have been quoted, he doubtless, in using the term, has in mind those who are more truly its representatives, and are worthy to receive the promises which he has to bestow. Just so, "Israel" is the recipient of promises and encouragement in xli. 14, xliii. 1, xliv. 23, while it is the object of rebuke in xl. 27, xliii. 22.

¶ Remarkable as is the prophet's contribution to the Biblical doctrine of God, it is surpassed in importance and originality by his teaching with regard to the mission of Israel. The very grandeur and universality of his conception of Jehovah appears to necessitate a profounder interpretation of Israel's place in history than any previous prophet had explicitly taught. It might readily appear that a Being so exalted and glorious as Jehovah is here represented to be could not enter into special relations with any particular people of the earth, and that Israel could be no more to Him than the children of the Ethiopians (Am. ix. 7). This inference, which for a special purpose the prophet Amos seemed almost ready to draw, would obviously be fatal to the religion of revelation. It is little to say that this prophet does not accept the conclusion suggested; he repudiates it in the most direct and emphatic manner, declaring that since Israel was precious in His sight, Jehovah gives Egypt as its ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in its stead (xliii. 3). And whether he was conscious of the problem latent in his conceptions or not, it is certain he has provided a solution of it, which lies in the thought that Israel is *elect for the sake of mankind.* Jehovah cherishes a purpose of grace towards the whole human race (xlv. 18 ff.), and the meaning of His choice of Israel is that He uses it as His instrument in the execution of that world-wide purpose of salvation.[1]

2. The conception of the Servant of Jehovah culminates in chap. lii. 13–liii., a passage indelibly connected, to Christian readers, with the Passion of our Lord. And yet it is the work of a scholar to consider not merely all that the sacred language of prophecy may mean, and rightly mean, to ourselves, but, primarily at least, what it must have meant to the prophet himself, and to those for whom he wrote. And here we feel that we cannot be right in separating the conception of the Servant in this section from what has gone before. As before, so here, it can hardly be doubted that by the Servant the prophet means Israel, and that here also he is contemplating the work of Israel in the redemption of the world, and at the same time explaining the degradation of Israel in the past. If Israel had suffered, as it seemed, unjustly in the Babylonian Exile, and its position and character had been misunderstood by the world at large, this would be vindicated by its future glory in the eyes of the world, and the redemption of mankind at large.

[1] J. Skinner, *Isaiah, xxxix.–lxvi.*, p. xxx.

What makes it so difficult to suppose that in the last group of passages the Servant means simply Israel is not so much the intense personification of the ideal (although that is very remarkable, and weighs with many minds); it is rather the character attributed to the Servant and the fact that he is distinguished from Israel by having a work to do on behalf of the nation. He is to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved of Israel, to open blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon; "to raise up the land, to make them inherit the desolate heritages; saying to them that are bound, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves." That is, he is to be the agent in Jehovah's hand of effecting the release of Israel from captivity and of restoring it to its own land. Nay more, he endures persecution and opposition from his own countrymen, and dies the death of a martyr at their hands. His sufferings and death constitute an atonement for the sins of his people, so that with his stripes they are healed. He is one also who is in conscious and perfect sympathy with Jehovah's purpose in raising him up: he is neither blind nor deaf, but alert and sensitive and responsive to the Divine voice. So conscious is he of his mission, and so eager to succeed in it, that he speaks of himself as depressed and discouraged by its apparent failure so long as it was limited to the conversion and instruction of his own people, and as correspondingly cheered when it is revealed to him that his work has a larger scope, even the gathering of the whole race into the fold of the true religion. To this wider outlook there is attached the assurance of a signal success, which shall excite the astonishment of the nations and potentates of the world.

¶ The chief difficulty in the identification of the Servant with Israel is made by the sharp contrast between the ideal and the actual. In the New Testament use of the word "church" we find the same double meaning. The ideal church, the bride of Christ, is without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. But the church which actually exists is made up of frail and fallible men who too often must be rebuked for their unfaithfulness and immorality. There is an Israel within Israel to which alone the description of the Servant can be applied. This distinction between the ideal and the real Israel—that is, between the loyal and obedient kernel of the nation and the empirical mass, careless of its privileges—throws light on another problem. Some of the older prophets

were perplexed by the fact that the innocent so often suffer with the guilty. Jeremiah had questioned Yahweh as to the justice of His action just on this ground; Ezekiel had solved the problem by ignoring some of the facts. Our author believes in the purifying nature of affliction, but he goes one step further in that he sees suffering to be the way in which a missionary must walk in order to carry out his mission. In the passage which forms the culmination of the Servant poems Yahweh Himself makes this plain. Here He calls attention to the Servant as one who has suffered deeply—"Marred was his appearance out of all human likeness, and his form out of semblance to the sons of men." But as marked as the suffering will be the obeisance of many: "Before him kings will be awe-struck, for that which had not been told them they see." At this point the Gentile kings themselves take up the description. They confess that they had thought the Servant smitten of God and afflicted. Now they see that he was, indeed, afflicted, but not for his own sake; the innocent suffered for the guilty: "Surely he bore our griefs and carried our sorrows." The smitten Israel even goes down to death in quiet resignation to the will of God. But death is not the end; a resurrection is to follow so that the Servant shall see the fruit of his labour. Since the only resurrection of which we have had a hint up to this point is the resurrection of the nation, foretold by Ezekiel, we must suppose that this is the conception cherished by the author.[1]

3. To attempt more precise definition may perhaps be too great a refinement, a drawing of distinctions which would not have been present to the prophet's mind. Person or personification, this at least is the culmination of the idea of Israel as the Servant of Jehovah, whether he expected the features of the portrait to be realized in a single individual or in the restored and purified nation. It represents the ideal Servant perfectly fulfilling his work. It shows how that work must be accomplished in the face of misunderstanding and opposition and persecution; how redemption can be achieved only through vicarious suffering, and life be won only through death. It is possible that some features in that portrait were taken from the actual experience of prophets and other faithful servants of God, and united in an ideal combination; that it sums up the experiences of the past, and through them points forward to the future. The significance of that portrait for the prophet's contemporaries was that it expressed the certain assur-

[1] H. P. Smith, *The Religion of Israel*, 257.

ance that the purpose for which Israel had been created and chosen and preserved would not fail of its accomplishment. It is upon the basis of the atonement made by the Servant that the glowing description in chap. liv., of Zion's restoration in a covenant which is never to be broken, rests. When Israel has confessed its sin, and recognized the work of the Servant in and for it, it can fulfil its mission and become the mother of the universal Church. It is noteworthy that the Servant of Jehovah is not mentioned again. Instead of "the Servant," collective or individual, we meet with "the servants," as though in the restored Israel every individual would in his part fulfil the vocation of the whole.

¶ When we speak of the "ideal Israel," we do not mean that the prophet is simply living in a land of dreams, far from the solid earth. Each stage in their experience of God's dealings with them has emphasized for the people of Israel some special element in the Divine purpose, has contributed some distinct features to the end and goal of their development as the instrument in God's intention of salvation for the world. We can discern that with absolute clearness, as we look back across the Old Testament period, and follow the orderly succession of its epochs. The prophet felt the same truth intuitively, on the ground of experience. As he surveyed the history, he would be conscious that in each stage of the development there existed a sketch, if one may so say, of the ideal, a sketch gradually filled in as the spiritual outlook of the people was enlarged, its lines and colours growing in beauty and balance, until at last it stood before him in this mysterious, finished picture of the Servant of Jehovah.[1]

4. Whatever may have been the precise idea which the prophet's portrait of the suffering and triumphant Servant of Jehovah conveyed to himself and his contemporaries,—and it is impossible for us to tell how far they were allowed to see into the mysterious truth which it foreshadowed,—it is impossible for us who read it in the light of its fulfilment to doubt that it was intended by the Holy Spirit to point forward to Christ. In Him alone it receives its complete explanation. He takes up the work which Israel could not do. As Israel's ideal representative, He sums up in Himself and carries out to its fullest development all that every true Israelite, every faithful prophet, every patient

[1] H. A. A. Kennedy, in *The Expository Times*, xix. 348.

martyr had foreshown, in many parts and in many fashions, of the Servant's work. Israel was "the Messianic nation"; and the Messiah who came in the fulness of times was the true and perfect Servant, whose redemptive work was exercised for His own people first, and then for the world. He was the final outcome and development of Israel; yet no mere natural product or spontaneous development, but the Divinely fore-ordained and Divinely given crown and consummation of the nation's history.

¶ The Deutero-Isaiah has been rightly called pre-eminently the Evangelical Prophet. Both the tone and the subject of the book justify the title. The opening passage (xl. 1–11), with its message of comfort, speaks home to the heart and thrills as few words can. It has been likened to pulses of soft celestial music, "which steal from heaven as gently as the first ripples of light in a cloudless dawn." And it is just this spirit, permeating as it does the whole of his prophecy, which helps to inspire us with the confidence that the progress and advancement of the human race is the cause of God Himself. This it is which makes him above all other writers of the Old Testament the preacher of good tidings: while the summons to declare these good tidings — God's-spell —to the nations, has been and is being answered by the many thousands who have preached and still are preaching the Gospel of Christ in the heathen world.[1]

¶ The Gospel, which is the distinctive contribution of Christianity to the world's history, is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the Gospel. It is not His teaching alone, though that is full of glad tidings; it is not His death alone for the sin of the world, though His death, as the means of man's reconciliation with God, is included in the Gospel; it is not even His rising again, though by it life and immortality are brought to light; His teaching and His cross and His resurrection find their ground and explanation in what He was—they are the exposition or unfolding of His personality. The new fact, which is itself both "God's-spell," the Divine word to and in humanity, and the "good news" to men, is that, within the limits of the great human family, there has been one life, one personality, in whom the perfect relation of humanity to God has been achieved, and the eternal character and inner nature of God revealed. In Jesus, God, the unseen, ever-present factor in the history of the universe, enters into possession of humanity and reveals His true character in the relations of human life; and, equally, humanity, or man's nature, enters into possession of the powers and freedom of eternal spirit. The Gospel is thus not a

[1] F. H. Woods and F. E. Powell, *The Hebrew Prophets*, iii. 216.

form of words, nor a doctrine, nor a scheme of reforms for this world or truths about the next; but a person, a fact out of which and the interpretations of it, all these legitimately come.[1]

¶ If a missionary to-day wishes to reassure those who have been converted from heathenism to Christianity of the truth of the religion which they profess, he will appeal not to the consistency of their theory of life as compared with the contradictions and confusions of paganism, but to the change which they have consciously experienced. "You remember what you once were," he will say to them, "when you were still in ignorance of Christ, when you were still in the environment of the old heathen society. You remember what you were, and you know what you have become since you were initiated by baptism into the fellowship of Jesus." This and nothing else has been the appeal of the preacher of the Gospel right onward from the days of the apostles. He is not ashamed of his message, because he knows from the experience not only of his own life but of his evangelistic work that Christ is a dynamic, the very power of God. Every new field of labour, in proportion as it helps us to distinguish between the message and the conditions of life and thought under which it was first apprehended, increases the confidence with which the one living truth is presented anew. It is addressed to men as men, finding an entry into hearts and minds which have been prepared for its quickening influence by an education as various as the histories, the circumstances, the mental and moral equipments of the nations of the earth.[2]

[1] D. Macfadyen, *Truth in Religion*, 134.
[2] J. G. Simpson, *What is the Gospel?* 25.

JEREMIAH.

I.

JEREMIAH'S CAREER.

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Jeremiah's Career.

Thou therefore gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee: be not dismayed at them, lest I dismay thee before them.—Jer. i. 17.

There is a tragic interest attaching to the life and times of Jeremiah. The circumstances of the age, the person of the prophet, the character of his message, all combine to demand our sympathetic study. Who can watch unmoved, even at the distance of twenty-five centuries, the death-agony of a nation, and that nation the chosen people of God? Who can fail to be deeply touched by the story of the prophet's life-long martyrdom, ended not improbably by a martyr's death—that story with its frank confessions of human weakness, and its unrivalled testimony to the reality of God-given strength? Who can ponder without awe the record of human hardness and obstinacy, insensible alike to the pleadings of love and to the denunciations of wrath? Who can trace without wonder and reverence the irresistible advance of God's purpose through and in spite of man's opposition to His will, bringing life out of death, and shaping a new order out of the dissolution of the old?

Again, the interest of the Book of Jeremiah itself is unique. On the one hand, it is our most reliable and elaborate source for the long period of history which it covers; on the other, it presents us with prophecy in its most intensely human phase, manifesting itself through a strangely attractive personality that was subject to like doubts and passions with ourselves.

I.

A Prophet's Training.

1. A brisk walk of an hour northward from Jerusalem, along one of the great highways which radiate from the sacred city,

brings one to the little town of Anâta, the Anathoth of the Hebrews. It is unattractive to-day, with its few poor hovels, and it must have been insignificant also in antiquity. Although shut off from Jerusalem by hills, it figured as one of the northern military outposts of the capital. It is referred to in the Book of Joshua (xxi. 8) as the residence of certain priestly families.

To one of these families belonged Hilkiah, the father of Jeremiah. It is easy to imagine that, on the day of his birth (which he later, in a time of deep despondency, bitterly cursed) heavy clouds shut out the warm sunshine, and the descending rains converted the filth, which is never wanting in an Oriental town, into slippery slime—a true suggestion of the unpleasant environment amidst which he was destined to spend his long life.

Concerning his boyhood, we have some hints in the opening chapters of his prophecy. In the character of his parents he recognized an important element in his preparation for the work of a prophet. Possibly some one of his ancestors belonged to that group of disciples who drank in and treasured the teachings of the great Isaiah. Jeremiah's sermons demonstrated that he was also a careful student of the earlier prophets. With Hosea, whose language and ideas made the deepest impression upon him, he must have recognized the closest kinship, in experience as well as in thought. For both lived in the deep shadow of a great national catastrophe which they were powerless to avert; both were rejected by their contemporaries, and both, though capable of the most intense happiness, were denied all the joys which their age held dear.

¶ Anathoth was the city to which Abiathar was banished when he was deposed by Solomon from the priesthood of Jerusalem, and it is by no means improbable that Jeremiah, who is said to be of the priests that were in Anathoth, was a descendant of Abiathar, and thus of Eli the custodian of the ark at Shiloh. If so, his family would cherish some of the proudest memories in Israel, and additional point would thus be given to his reference to the destruction of Shiloh and the obsoleteness of the ark in the Messianic period.[1]

2. The religious reform of Hezekiah's time had been followed by a terrible reaction in the reign of Manasseh. His subsequent

[1] A. S. Peake.

repentance seems to have come too late to have much permanent effect upon the ordering of the kingdom, nor was Amon's brief reign productive of improvement. This was the state of affairs when Josiah came to the throne. With good advisers in Ahikam, Hilkiah, and others, and with a nation probably more than half weary of idolatry and its attendant evils, even before the discovery of the lost Book of the Law, it was an opportunity not to be neglected for an attempt at the revival of religion. And yet the reformation, as in the time of Hezekiah, seems not to have penetrated much below the surface. Dishonesty, open licentiousness, murder, adultery, false swearing—such is the picture that Jeremiah draws. The state of religion in Judah called for a reformer.

It was not merely the religious situation, however, that was responsible for Jeremiah's appearance as a prophet. The tidings had come to Judah that a new and terrible danger threatened her from the north. A great migration of the Scythians from their home in the far north had been set in motion. They poured as a vast irresistible torrent over a large area of Western Asia. They were like locusts for numbers and rapacity, sparing neither age nor sex, leaving ruin everywhere in their train. It was a new kind of terror that these uncivilized hordes inspired in peoples long inured to the brutality of Assyria. No deliberate design of founding an empire seems to have animated them; indeed they were not skilled in the art of war and won their conquests by sheer force of numbers and ruthless ferocity. They were not equipped for storming cities, but they could starve the inhabitants into surrender. They influenced political history mainly by weakening the power of Assyria, and thus preparing for its ultimate downfall. We are told that their dominion lasted for twenty-eight years. Since the fall of the Assyrian empire was an event whose importance for the history of Judah can scarcely be exaggerated, the Scythian invasion would on that ground alone claim to be mentioned in the story of Jeremiah's times. But the Scythians' influence on Jewish history was not merely indirect. The tide swept nearer and nearer to Palestine, and Jeremiah like Zephaniah seems to have seen in these unwelcome visitors from the north the instruments of Divine judgment on Judah. In the vision of the seething caldron which followed his call he learned

that evil was to come out of the north, and that Jehovah was bringing all the kingdoms of the north against Jerusalem.

3. Such, then, was the situation in Judah when Jeremiah received his call. An apostate people on the one hand, the approach of the uncanny foe from the north on the other. It was not primarily the danger but the sin of Judah that filled her prophets with foreboding of her ruin; and since Jeremiah was convinced that the cup of her iniquity was full, it was natural that he should indentify the agents of God's vengeance with the Scythians. Such being the situation at the time of his call, we must now consider the call itself.

II.

A Prophet's Task.

1. Of what may be called the call to work of its heroes the Bible is wonderfully communicative: it describes with great fulness how they were led to abandon private life and come forward as public witnesses for God. These scenes are among the most remarkable passages of the Divine record. Of this nature was the appearance of Jehovah at the burning bush, when Moses was called to his great life-work. The night scene in which the boy Samuel was called by the voice of God, as he slumbered in the tabernacle, is one of unapproachable beauty. Isaiah has described his own call in the sixth chapter of his prophecy—the scene in the Temple when he saw Jehovah on a throne, high and lifted up, and around Him the seraphim, chanting, "Holy, holy, holy." The account of Ezekiel's call fills several chapters at the beginning of the book of his prophecies. The call of St. Paul, on the way to Damascus, is related no fewer than three times in the Book of Acts. In every one of these cases the call not only is an incident full of spiritual grandeur, but it also throws a great deal of light on the life which follows. Jeremiah also received a special call to the work of the prophet, and he has described it with his own pen.

We are at first struck with disappointment at the narrative, when we remember the vision of Isaiah and that of Ezekiel.

There is no splendid awe-inspiring manifestation of God; the prophet is not penetrated like Isaiah with a conviction of his own uncleanness by its contrast with God's holiness; nor does he fall on his face like Ezekiel, overpowered by God's radiant glory. Yet the narrative gains an effectiveness of its own by the very absence of accessories. God and the man are here alone in intimate conversation; no seraphim or cherubim mar the impressive simplicity of the scene. It is a fit prelude to the life-work of the prophet who first clearly conceived religion as a personal relation between man and God.

¶ The one question is, whether God calls us: it is not whether we feel fit or no. If God gives us the call, God will give us the grace. We may under-estimate ourselves, as well as over-estimate ourselves. St. Paul said, "Who is sufficient for these things?" If St. Paul, how much more we? The question is not as to anything in the past or present; but as to the call of God. If God calls us, He will fit us. When God put our soul into the bodies which we received of our parents, He had His own special purpose for each of us. He willed each of us to be saved in doing our own appointed work. He had us and our whole selves to be formed in our own special way. We sometimes hear of a person mistaking his profession; of his being, *e.g.*, a good lawyer spoiled, a good man of business spoiled, *i.e.*, he had missed the employment of life for which God adapted [him]. I cannot tell what your calling is; I know only certain outward dispositions: hold up your soul as a sheet of white paper to God, for Him to write on it what He wills. He has promised to hear prayer: say with St. Augustine, "Give what Thou commandest, and command what Thou willest." Do not hurry, but pray Him to teach you.[1]

2. In the call of Jeremiah we may discover the sort of man whom God chooses as the medium for His speech. And our discovery will greatly startle us. We shall find the heavenly treasure in a simple earthen vessel. Not in the metropolis, but in the poor village of Anathoth, three miles to the north; not in an elder, but in a youth; not among the high and noble, but in the family of an undistinguished priest; not in a man mighty as Elijah, eloquent as Isaiah, or seraphic as Ezekiel; but in one who was timid and shrinking, conscious of his helplessness, yearning for a sympathy and love he was never to know—such was the

[1] *Spiritual Letters of Edward Bouverie Pusey*, 23.

chosen organ through which the word of the Lord came to that corrupt and degenerate age.

¶ Frederick Denison Maurice pointed out that it was a singular feature of the life of Jerusalem, at the time when the great religious reformation was begun under Josiah, that both the king Josiah and the great prophet Jeremiah were young men. The association of these two Hebrew youths as leaders in the work of restoration of the Kingdom of God in Judæa was very significant. For the heart of the reformer we look to youth. It is then that ideals are noblest; they have not been lowered in obedience to the world's demands for compromises and expediencies. There is a healthy impatience of evil. Youth does not mean to acquiesce in wrong as the inevitable. It will hear no counsels of despair. It is intolerant of delays and hesitations. With youth "*Now* is the accepted time, *Now* is the day of salvation." It may possibly expect to achieve too much, but that is better than expecting nothing at all. It is time to sit down and weep when there are no more worlds to conquer, no wrongs left to be righted, no heights to be stormed, no heroisms to be dared for the Kingdom of God.[1]

3. How did Jeremiah receive the call? The natural effect of the Divine intimation which had been made to Jeremiah would have been the rush of all that was in him to the point indicated, in eager desire to be engaged in God's work; and this no doubt came later. But it was not the first result. On the contrary, the first feeling was a recoil from the course indicated. His reply to the voice which had addressed him was not, like Isaiah's, "Here am I; send me," but, "Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child."

This has been the first feeling of many of the servants of God at the same critical juncture. Moses received the call of God in the same way; and so far did he carry his refusal as to arouse the anger of Jehovah. When John Knox was called to be a preacher by the acclamation of his fellow-prisoners in the church of St. Andrews, he was so overwhelmed that, after an ineffectual attempt to address the congregation, he burst into tears, rushed out, and shut himself up in his chamber, persuaded that he could never appear in the pulpit again.

In Jeremiah's mind there must have been an instinctive fear

[1] C. Silvester Horne.

of the opposition which he would have to encounter; for the state of the times was such that anyone could foresee, even at the first glance, that a true prophet would have to lift up his voice against the whole course of society and bring down on his head the maledictions of high and low. For Jeremiah had a more difficult task than Isaiah. The latter prophet must have had on his side nearly all the zealous worshippers of Jehovah. The State was more than once in great danger, and it was the burden of Isaiah's prophecies that, by simply trusting in Jehovah and obeying His commandments, the State would infallibly be delivered. But in Jeremiah's time there seems to have been a great revival of purely external religion. Men went to the Temple and performed all the ceremonial laws which concerned them, but neglected those practical duties which make up so large a portion of true religion. There was a party of this kind in Isaiah's time, but it was not so powerful, because the misfortunes of the country seemed to show clearly that Jehovah was displeased with the state of the national religion. In Jeremiah's time, on the other hand, the continued prosperity which at first prevailed was equally regarded as a proof that God looked favourably upon His people, in accordance with those repeated promises in the Book of Deuteronomy, that, if the people obeyed the law of Jehovah, Jehovah would bless their basket and their store, and would keep them in peace and safety.

Never was heavier burden laid upon the shoulders of mortal man. A man of tender, loving, yielding, deeply impressible spirit, Jeremiah loved his country intensely. He would have given all he had to see Judah flourishing, Jerusalem prosperous; and, lo, we see him compelled by his destiny to announce to his fellow-citizens nothing but misfortune. Yet we may recognize in Jeremiah's character a special fitness for his mission. That tender, shrinking, sympathetic heart could more fully feel, and more adequately express, the ineffable Divine sorrow over the guilty people, the eternal love which was never stronger than at the moment when it seemed to have been metamorphosed into bitter wrath and implacable vengeance.

¶ The record of the call of Jeremiah contains a parable as well as a promise. There is not one of us, I suppose, who is not often overwhelmed when he compares his task and his resources. "What am I," we each say, "that I should maintain such a cause

against such adversaries? that I should challenge popular opinion? that I should rebuke the unbelief which arrays itself in decent conformity? that I should preach the blessedness of punishment for sin? that I should uphold the gospel of sacrifice? What am I? a child without the innocent confidence of ignorance, a child in waywardness, a child in knowledge and in force." As long as we look at ourselves the judgment is most just. But what then? "Say not," the Lord says in our hearts, "I am a child. . . . Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth . . . I have set thee . . . to destroy and to overthrow; to build, and to plant." After all, opinion is stronger than the sword, the prophet is mightier than the soldier, the victories of thought are more enduring than the victories of force. The cause which is committed to us is not our cause: it is the cause of God.[1]

4. It was no easy thing for Jeremiah to answer "Yes" to the call of God. The call involved a lifetime of brave service. Matters in the nation were sure to go from bad to worse. Difficulties after difficulties therefore, as they developed, must be faced. He stood at what we name "the parting of the ways": if he did as God wished, his whole life must be given to the work indicated; if he said "No" to God's call, he would drift along with the rest of the people, leaving them to their fate, he no better and perhaps no worse than they. In some respects there is nothing better than to be *forced* to a decision on some important matter, particularly if that decision is a decision involving character. It was a choice with Jeremiah whether he would live unselfishly for God or selfishly for himself. This choice ordinarily is the supreme choice in every one's life. It is the supreme choice that the Christian pulpit is constantly presenting. Present character and eternal destiny are shaped according to this choice.

¶ The contemplation of such a life as that of Jeremiah reveals to us God's ideal man for the times, and what is God's purpose for those who have begun to long and pray that the Kingdom of Heaven may be established on earth. We have some of us lately been reading the story of Laurence Oliphant, and the strange influence exercised over him by the motto, "Live the life." To "live the life," he was content to abandon brilliant prospects, and a sphere of increasing influence, and go out to the obscure little community in America where he was obliged to submit to the lowest forms of manual labour, that, as he said, he might be

[1] Bishop Westcott.

"bullied" till his pride was broken. It is, of course, possible to conceive that such a discipline might be the necessary stage in some men's spiritual training to fit them for the service of God. But it seems quite certain that to live in an isolated colony, apart from the beating heart of the world, must be fruitful of many evils besides the supreme one of the impoverishment of a world that needs all the spiritual power it can get, by the withdrawal of those most able to help it. There have been times when the same ideal that possessed Laurence Oliphant has possessed the imagination of the Church, and asceticism and monastic seclusion have become "the rage." At such times there have been crowds of men and women who, as Dr. Hatch said, "were ready to forsake all and follow John the Baptist into the desert, rather than Christ into the world." But even if such times produced a kind of unnatural and artificial sanctity among a few, the mass of mankind suffered from the loss to its affairs of the spiritual counsel and moral energy of the men who were saving their own souls in solitude. The holiness with which God endows His own people is not a choice exotic that cannot live in the common air and light and temperature in which their brethren live their lives and do their work. It is a real working righteousness, a texture of the spirit that will stand the strain and bear the stress of the engagements of every day. It is a holiness that will wear. And the business of God's servants, however young they may be, is to receive this communication of God's Spirit, and then go forth to mingle in the life in which they have a share, and endeavour to *reproduce God's ideas in the kingdom of which Providence has made them citizens.* This is the task of building up the city of God on earth.[1]

¶ Professor Bosanquet worked it [the doctrine of duty] out in a new shape in the Gifford Lectures which he delivered in this University [of Edinburgh] last year [1912]. There he sought to exhibit the world as a "vale of soul-making," to use the phrase which he borrowed from Keats, in which the soul reached most nearly to perfection by accepting without hesitating the station and the duties which the contingencies of existence had assigned to it, and by striving to do its best with them. Looked at in the light that comes from the Eternal within our breasts, the real question was not whether health or wealth or success were ours. For the differences in degree of these were but droplets in the ocean of Eternity. What did matter, and what was of infinite consequence, was that we should be ready to accept with willingness the burden and the obligation which life had cast on us

[1] C. Silvester Horne.

individually, and be able to see that in accepting it, hard as it might be to do so, we were choosing a blessedness which meant far more for us than what is commonly called happiness could. We should rather be proud that the burden fell to us who had learned how to bear it. It thus, I may add by way of illustration of Mr. Bosanquet's words, was no sense of defeat, no meaningless cry of emotion, which prompted Emily Brontë when she defined her creed:—

> And if I pray, the only prayer
> That moves my lips for me
> Is, "Leave the heart that now I bear,
> And give me liberty!"
>
> Yes, as my swift days near their goal,
> 'Tis all that I implore;
> In life and death, a chainless soul,
> With courage to endure.[1]

III.

A Prophet's Treatment.

1. Jeremiah's ministry was a lifelong martyrdom. It was in its nature a burden that might well have crushed the strongest spirit. Not only was he compelled to stand almost alone against the whole nation; but he was actually the object of bitter persecution; his very life was constantly in danger. His neighbours at Anathoth sought to murder him. They "devised devices" against him, saying, "Let us destroy the tree with the fruit thereof, and let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name may be no more remembered." His own family raised the hue and cry after him, and could not be trusted. "Denounce, and we will denounce him, say all my familiar friends, they that watch for my halting; peradventure he will be enticed, and we shall prevail against him, and we shall take our revenge on him." The priest who was the chief officer of the Temple thrust him in the stocks for profaning (as he thought) the Temple court with his forebodings of evil. The popular prophets were in constant opposition to him, both in Jerusalem and in Babylon, endeavouring, only too

[1] Viscount Haldane, *The Conduct of Life* (1914), 8.

successfully, to neutralize his message with their flattering falsehoods. Not even when he solemnly predicted the death of Hananiah, and his prediction came to pass within two months, nor when he declared that Ahab and Zedekiah, who were not only false prophets, but also immoral men, would suffer the horrible Babylonian punishment of being burnt alive, did the people believe him.

At the time of the final siege of Jerusalem at the close of Zedekiah's reign, Jeremiah's philo-Babylonian policy was regarded as highly dangerous and rendered him liable to suspicion. Being accused of an attempt to desert, as many had already done, to the enemy, he was imprisoned and suffered many hardships and privations, and so remained until the city was taken. And yet he was not altogether without allies and helpers. A large number must have regarded him with respect. Even the king, though in a weak and timid fashion, sought his advice and befriended him—a fact to which he owed some amelioration of his troubles, and very probably his life. When the city was taken, Jeremiah, being given by Nebuchadnezzar's orders the choice of going to Babylon or of remaining at Jerusalem, decided to place himself under the protection of Gedaliah, the newly appointed governor of the city; and after the murder of the latter by Ishmael, he was eventually carried by force, with many others, into Egypt, where his last published words were a prediction of the conquest fulfilled, however, by Cambyses. We do not know how long Jeremiah survived the capture of Jerusalem, or where or how he died. There is, however, a tradition, mentioned by Tertullian, Jerome, and others, that the men of Tahpanhes, stung by his bitter words, stoned him to death; and it has been thought that in Heb. xi. 37 there is an allusion to this circumstance. But, however this may be, it is in Egypt that, amid mournful surroundings of obstinate idolatry, his teaching spurned and misunderstood, his country waste and desolate, the curtain falls upon the great prophet's life in darkness and desolation.

¶ Jeremiah has been likened to several characters in profane history—to Cassandra, the Trojan prophetess, whose fate it was never to be believed, though prophesying nothing but the truth; to Phocion, the rival of Demosthenes in the last generation of Athenian greatness, who maintained the unpopular but sound

doctrine that, if Athens were to escape worse evils, she must submit peaceably to the growing power of Macedon; to Dante, whose native state, Florence, was in relation to France and the Empire as Palestine was to Egypt and Babylon, while the poet like the prophet could only protest without effect against the ever-growing dangers.[1]

2. Such was Jeremiah's extraordinary career. Never surely was there a life of such unrelieved gloom. Like Newman, in our own times, he was early convinced that it was not the will of God that he should marry. He was an ascetic: "Thou shalt not go into the house of feasting, to sit with them to eat and to drink," was a voice he had heard from the Lord; and even from the solemn charities of burial he was equally to abstain. We are glad to find that he was the owner of a bit of land in Anathoth, and that he had a few loyal friends, especially those of the house of Shaphan. Was ever a man who loved his country placed in a position like his? Instead of cheering on his fellow-countrymen to resist the enemy by whom the city was invested, he had to advise the king in secret and the people in public to surrender; and after the fall of the city he received special marks of favour from the conqueror. What a contrast to the position of Isaiah, who, when the enemy was at the gates of Jerusalem, sustained the fainting courage of the garrison within the walls, and had his prophetic career crowned by a miracle of deliverance which he had predicted.

¶ The visible success of a faithful preacher is no test of his acceptableness before God. There are times when the Holy Spirit Himself seems to work in vain, and the world seems given up to the powers of evil. True, even then there is a "silver lining" to the cloud, if we only have faith to see it. There is always a "remnant according to the election of grace"; and there is often a late harvest which the sower does not live to see. It was so with the labours of Jeremiah, who, like the hero Samson, slew more in his death than in his life.[2]

¶ Was Jeremiah a true patriot in so continually expressing his conviction of the futility of resistance to Babylon? It must be remembered, first of all, that the religious idea with which Jeremiah was inspired is higher and broader than the idea of patriotism. Israel had a Divinely appropriated work; if it fell below its mission, what further right had it of existence? Perhaps

[1] A. W. Streane. [2] T. K. Cheyne.

it may be allowable to admit that such conduct as Jeremiah's would not in our day be regarded as patriotism. If the Government had fully committed itself to a definite and irrevocable policy, it is probable that all parties would agree to enforce at any rate silent acquiescence. One eminent man may, however, be appealed to in favour of Jeremiah's patriotism. Niebuhr, quoted by Sir Edward Strachey, writes thus at the period of Germany's deepest humiliation under Napoleon: "I told you, as I told every one, how indignant I felt at the senseless prating of those who talked of desperate resolves as of a tragedy. . . . To bear our fate with dignity and wisdom, that the yoke might be lightened, was my doctrine, and I supported it with the advice of the prophet Jeremiah, who spoke and acted very wisely, living as he did under King Zedekiah, in the times of Nebuchadnezzar, though he would have given different counsel had he lived under Judas Maccabæus, in the times of Antiochus Epiphanes."[1]

3. If ever there was a loving and patriotic heart, it was Jeremiah's. At any moment he would willingly have sacrificed his life for his country; and he may be said to have died for her many deaths. No wonder he often broke down under the burden of his destiny. There do not exist in literature passages more pathetic than those in which he complains of his lot. "Oh that my head were waters," he cries, "and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!" He often wished he were out of all the strife and trouble: "Oh," he cries, "that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of wayfaring men; that I might leave my people, and go from them!" He felt that the part which he had to play was quite contrary to his nature: "Woe is me, my mother, that thou hast borne me a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth! I have neither lent on usury, nor have men lent to me on usury; yet every one of them doth curse me." Sometimes he resolved that he would give it all up: "Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name." Sometimes he was so sad and dead-beaten that he wished he had never been born: "Cursed be the day wherein I was born: let not the day wherein my mother bare me be blessed. Cursed be the man who brought tidings to my father, saying, A man child is born unto thee; making him very glad."

[1] T. K. Cheyne.

¶ "The true patriot," said Freeman, "is he who seeks the highest welfare of his country, and who holds that the real welfare of his country is inseparable from right dealing. He will be zealous for the outward glory, dignity, and interest of the nation, but only so far as they are consistent with justice and honour." In short, he maintained that in the case of nations as of individuals, duty ought to come first and interest afterwards, though in both instances it would commonly be found that the highest interests were best secured in the end by a straightforward and fearless discharge of duty.[1]

¶ Love your country. Your country is the land where your parents sleep, where is spoken that language in which the chosen of your heart blushing whispered the first word of love; it is the home that God has given you, that by striving to perfect yourselves therein, you may prepare to ascend to Him. It is your name, your glory, your sign among the people. Give to it your thoughts, your counsels, your blood. Raise it up, great and beautiful, as it was foretold by our great men. And see that you leave it uncontaminated by any trace of falsehood or of servitude; unprofaned by dismemberment. Let it be one, as the thought of God.[2]

¶ Mazzini was more than the Italian Patriot, though he was that pre-eminently. His patriotism was the main outcome of a very powerful, original, and various mind. Without Religion, without faith in God and the habit of regarding all Nature and the whole course of Humanity, as a manifestation of God, the World, he believed, was rotten, and life a ghastly farce. His favourite word for the opposite way of thinking, and for all mere acquiescence in customary Religion without real belief, was Materialism. This word, which he pronounced in a cutting Italian way (*Matérrialism*), was his constant name of reprobation for a great many men whose mental power he acknowledged. It was the counterpart, spiritually and intellectually, of Individualism and Macchiavellism in practice; and the world was full of Materialists, Individualists, Macchiavellists. The restoration of a real faith in God and His manifestation through Humanity, was the great reform necessary in every nation. All else would follow.[3]

[1] W. R. W. Stephens, *The Life and Letters of Edward A. Freeman*, ii. 124.

[2] *Life and Writings of Joseph Mazzini*, vi. 163.

[3] D. Masson, *Memories of London in the 'Forties*, 196.

JEREMIAH.

II.

JEREMIAH'S CHARACTER.

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Jeremiah's Character.

For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt.—Jer. viii. 21.

No Old Testament character is so intimately known to us as Jeremiah. It is not simply that we are well informed as to many of the outward events of his life. The vital thing for us is that we are taken behind the veil and see revelation at work; we know the inmost thoughts and feelings of a strangely attractive personality.

He cannot limit himself to reproducing "the word of the Lord"; his individual nature is too strong for him, and asserts its right of expression. His life was a constant alternation between the action of the "burning fire" of revelation, and the reaction of human sensibilities. Truly has it been observed that "Jeremiah has a kind of feminine tenderness and susceptibility; strength was to be educed out of a spirit which was inclined to be timid and shrinking"; and again, that "he was a loving, *priestly* spirit, who felt the unbelief and sin of his nation as a heavy, overwhelming burden." Who does not remember these touching words?—

> "Is there no balm in Gilead? is there no physician there?
> Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?
> Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears,
> That I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!" (viii. 22, ix. 1).

And again:

> "Let mine eyes run down with tears night and day,
> And let them not cease:
> For the virgin daughter of my people is broken with a great breach,
> With a very grievous blow" (xiv. 17).

In this respect Jeremiah marks an epoch in the history of prophecy. Isaiah and the prophets of his generation are fully absorbed in their message, and allow no space for the exhibition of personal feeling. In Jeremiah, on the other hand, the element of human feeling is constantly overpowering the prophetic. But let not Jeremiah be disparaged, and let not those triumph over him who are gifted with greater power of self-repression. Self-repression does not always imply the absence of selfishness. Jeremiah's demonstrativeness is called forth, not by purely personal troubles, but by those of God's people. The words of Jesus, "Ye would not," and "But now they are hid from thine eyes," might, as Delitzsch remarks, be placed as mottoes to the Book of Jeremiah.

We shall speak of the character of Jeremiah under the following leading traits—

(i.) His Loneliness; (ii.) His Introspection; (iii.) His Despondency; (iv.) His Anger; (v.) His Sense of Destiny; (vi.) His Likeness to Christ.

i. His Loneliness.

1. Such a task as that to which Jeremiah was called demanded one who, however weak in body, should be a man of rare courage, unterrified by popular clamour or princely disfavour, fixed in resolve, and thoroughly devoted to the ascertained will of God. He needed not natural gifts of oratory. His work was not to persuade, but rather to testify, to express the thoughts of the few remaining pious ones of the nation. The wearing effect of constant failure, the intense pain of seeing his nation advance step by step on the road to its overthrow, the hostility and abuse which it was his daily lot to bear from those whom he sought to warn—these required as a counterpoise a heroic spirit that should not shrink from the encounter, as well as ceaseless devotion to Him whose commission he had borne from the womb. And yet he was naturally of a disposition that shrank from public life, and deprecated all possibility of prophesying in God's name. And after he had entered upon his work, his naturally desponding mind would dwell upon the fact that the message was received with lightness of heart, incredulity, and irritation. "I am become a laughing-stock all the day, every one mocketh me."

Of kinsmen according to the spirit he had but few; none indeed—such was the penalty of genius—in the full sense of the term. It was his fate to be shut out from those joys for which his appreciation was so keen and for which he seemed so fitted by nature. He felt his isolation, his exclusion from the common life of his fellows, its innocent pleasures, its grateful relaxations. With a mind turned in upon itself or its relations with God, turned outward on the inevitable fate of his people and the sin to which it was due, he brooded in solitude. His spirit was always tense, strung to a high pitch; he and his vocation had become one.

¶ How far away we are from each other. Two walls of flesh between me and the nearest person on earth! Even the eyes mysterious. I look, and see two little pictures of my outward self, when all I long for is the image of the other soul at those windows; and then, we may reduce our bodies to the same pace, sit, walk, run evenly together, but how seldom will the mind run in couples! My neighbour's mind has wings, and reaches the goal before I have so much as seen it, or mine is half-way to another goal by mistake, while my neighbour is labouring to explain where it is that he wants to go to.[1]

2. Warm-hearted as he was, Jeremiah was not content, as Isaiah had once been, to withdraw himself into the society of a small circle of sympathetic disciples. Indeed it is not certain that he had any such disciples. To the professional time-serving prophets of his day he stood in direct antagonism, and his doleful temperament would hardly have attracted the more sanguine and youthful spirits. In fact, so far as we can gather, Baruch seems to have been in the end his only faithful and constant adherent. His feelings of solitude and isolation caused him frequently to take refuge in religious meditation, which, with an absence of reserve that often characterizes deeply sensitive natures, he has preserved in his book. In this respect and in his self-analysis, he reminds us more than once of St. Paul, and they are of great interest from a psychological point of view. Here, too, Jeremiah distinguishes very clearly between the workings of his natural self and the voice of God within him. So much is this the case that in more than one instance they assume the form of a dialogue between himself and Jehovah.

[1] *Gathered Leaves from the Prose of Mary E. Coleridge* (1915), 226.

¶ Man in himself is the loneliest being in the world. The wall of his separate personality shuts him off, as to his interior self, in an awful isolation from all the millions that surround him. His neighbours may look in at his windows, may come into his guest-chamber, but they penetrate never the cell where he sits alone. He is like the island continent of Australia, whose boundaries are rimmed with ports and cities, but whose vast interior lies silent, uninhabited. Yet assuredly this loneliness is no mischance, no accident of his being. It is an insulation from the outward, to secure the uninterrupted play of his spiritual contacts. For the trained soul knows itself as not alone. It knows a perpetual, invisible companionship. It has a speech which it cannot translate to its neighbour. In the glare of the day, in the hum of the crowd, in the silent watches of the night, it talks with the Unseen, it has converse with its Friend. Its past, its present, its future; its trials, temptations, defeats; its joys, its griefs, all enter into that constant colloquy. Lamartine, in *Les Confidences*, speaks of a certain walk in the garden of their French home, where his mother spent always a certain hour of the day—upon which neither husband nor children ever intruded—where she paced, her hands clasped, her eyes lifted to heaven, her lips moving to unuttered words. It was the sacred hour of her speech with God; an hour from which she returned refreshed and renewed. Poor souls, that have not such a Beulah-land to walk in! Poor souls that have, in their inner territory, no such mountain height from which to look down upon their world, to look up to their Father in heaven![1]

3. It was his loneliness that forced Jeremiah more and more upon God. In his relations with God he displays what a more timid reverence would feel to be a daring familiarity. But his awe was none the less deep, nor did he think too meanly of his privilege to stand in the council of God. He enters with intimate sympathy into His relations with Israel, the wounded love, the burning indignation, the readiness to forgive. And he in turn lays bare his soul to God. Startled at the disclosure of the evil possibilities of his own heart, deceitful and desperately sick, he prays the skilled Physician of Souls, who knows his malady through and through, to heal him. Or when his lot becomes too bitter, and he can endure it no longer, he turns upon God now with plaintive expostulation, now even with fierce resentment. And God shows

[1] J. Brierley, *Religion and To-Day*, 66.

him scant sympathy, rather He rebukes him for faltering and bids him brace himself for trials still more severe, rising above his human weakness in the faith that the Divine promise of protection would be fulfilled.

¶ It is a great hour in any man's life when he is obliged to stand up alone and state his case or defend his cause. What an hour that was in Paul's history when before the Roman officials "no man stood with him," but, dependent as he was on sympathy and fellowship, he stood alone! It is when a man is absolutely left alone, in danger or disgrace, that the deepest test of his character is reached. That is the reason why the night-time, which seems to say to us "You are alone with God," has its impressiveness and why the death hour has a similar impressiveness.[1]

Oh, at the eagle's height
To lie i' the sweet of the sun,
While veil after veil takes flight
And God and the world are one.

Oh, the night on the steep!
All that his eyes saw dim
Grows light in the dusky deep,
And God is alone with him.[2]

ii. His Introspection.

Jeremiah shrank instinctively from the proposal made to him to be a prophet: "Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child." The prophet is not to be blamed for this instinctive unwillingness. It is natural for a man, when he has suddenly presented to him any great undertaking, to shrink back from it; the more natural, the more he feels its greatness. Moses also entreated that he might be relieved of the great commission laid on him to deliver Israel from Egypt. And Jonah fled, that he might not have to deliver the message of God in a great, unknown, heathen city. Perhaps Jeremiah's shrinking is neither to be greatly blamed nor to be very greatly commended; though certainly more to be commended than blamed. It was possibly largely a matter of mental constitution. We do not perceive it at all in some other prophets, such as Isaiah. This prophet was

[1] J. G. K. McClure, *Living for the Best*, 93.
[2] A. E., *Collected Poems*, 136.

a sort of John Knox, who never feared the face of man. He confronted Kings and Commons alike with the same resolute composure. In all his prophecies, there is not a word about his own feelings. He was too strong to be conscious of what was going on in his own mind, or to analyse his own reflections. The truth he had to deliver absorbed him; the sense of the situation in which his country stood swept away before it all thoughts of himself. But Jeremiah was a man of another sort. He was continually looking into his own mind. No doubt he lived long after Isaiah; and, as happens in all history of mind, advance in religious thought led to a greater subjectivity, to more introspection, self-analysis, criticism of himself and others. Jeremiah is the more interesting man for this reason, but Isaiah the more healthy man.

¶ In some ways the preacher of to-day has a task more trying than the prophet. The prophets were statesmen in the Kingdom of God. It was the destinies of the nation that they charged themselves with. Of course this involved the destinies of individuals, but only indirectly. The modern preacher has before him, no doubt, a congregation; but it is the destinies, the eternal destinies, of the individuals in it that are laid on him. He has to counsel and speak to minds—minds which may be perplexed, or despondent, or anxious; or it may be, on the other hand, thoughtless; to guide each, to speak to each, in the right way; to find the truth, the thought, the consideration that will just be that needed by each mind to lead it to life. Anyone, thinking seriously of such a responsibility, may well exclaim, "Ah, Lord God! I cannot speak."[1]

¶ It is easy to fall into ill-natured gossip about others, and these wise pilgrims [Christian and Faithful] avoid that danger by turning the talk upon themselves. It is the instinct which has created the class-meetings of Methodism, and the pre-communion gatherings of "the men" in the Highlands of Scotland. No doubt this, too, has it dangers. Introspection, besides an inherent tendency towards morbidness, is apt on the one hand to foster vanity and self-importance, and on the other hand to exaggerate experience and lead to fiction. Worse than any other danger is its tendency to violate the sanctities of the individual life. All our deeper spiritual experience is essentially solitary, and by talking of it we are apt to cheapen it, and so to vulgarise our souls. Yet now and again, when it is done in the confidence of

[1] A. B. Davidson, *The Called of God*, 213.

an intimate friendship, with simplicity and without parade, it may be a precious and valuable exercise.[1]

iii. His Despondency.

1. Jeremiah's habit of introspection was no doubt in some measure the cause of his prevailing despondency. The whole of his life seems to have been one of great and prolonged sorrow. He has been well called "the weeping prophet," and is proverbially the herald of gloom. This was, of course, largely due to the times in which he lived. There being no hope for the political redemption of his people, he saw that their only chance of personal safety lay in surrendering to Babylon. If, as the calamity approached, he foresaw the dawn of a more glorious hope, it was only in the distant future, after a period of servitude and humiliation. But the gloom was even more the result of his acutely sensitive disposition. Other prophets in foretelling the Divine judgments were frequently so completely overpowered by their message that their own feelings were absorbed in the Divine wrath with which they were inspired, and they became almost literally the mouthpiece of God. But this was seldom the case with Jeremiah. At times, indeed, he felt the justice of God's judgments, and the voice of God speaks through him. But more than once he distinguishes this Divine fury from his own personal feelings as a painful burden too heavy for him to bear. Over and over again he bewails, sometimes with exquisite pathos, the miseries which are coming upon his people and his land; or again, he mourns over the sins which made their punishment necessary.

¶ In an unaccountably silly passage in his *Life of Erasmus*, Froude actually prints it that "Erasmus like all men of real genius, had a light and elastic nature." That senseless and impossible passage came back to my mind as I read this melancholy book of this man of real genius. And this also came to my mind out of North's *Plutarch*: "Aristotle has a place where he says that the wisest men be ever melancholy, as Socrates, Plato, and Hercules were." And I have read somewhere also on this matter that "merely to say man is to say melancholy." I wish it were. At any rate, to say "man endued by nature with sufficient sensibility, and then by grace with sufficient spiritual sympathy," is to say the most profoundly melancholy of men. "O hear me," says

[1] J. Kelman, *The Road*, i. 164.

the profoundly intellectual and equally spiritual Jacob Behmen in a comforting passage, "Hear me, for I know well myself what melancholy is! I also have lodged all my days in the melancholy inn!"[1]

2. At times he seems to have well-nigh despaired not only of success but of life itself. "Woe is me, my mother, that thou hast borne me a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth! . . . every one of them doth curse me." Immediately afterwards he contrasts the joy in which, inspired no doubt by the promises given him, he had entered upon the prophetic office with the disheartening reception that awaited him. Such is the bitterness of his sufferings that on one occasion we find him relating his efforts to keep silence. "And if I say, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name, then there is in mine heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with forbearing, and I cannot contain."

¶ Jeremiah was a mental sufferer—his affliction came from within. What was the nature of this mental suffering? The pain of the mind may have as many different sources as the pain of the body. Every feeling of the heart has its own special pain —pride, humility, anger, envy, love. What is Jeremiah's source of mental unrest? It came from the keenness of his intellectual sympathy. Intellectual sympathy is the power to put yourself in the place of another—to feel another's experience as if it were your own. Men possess the power in vastly varying degrees. In some it seems almost absent—there are those who say, "Am I my brother's keeper?" In others it is so strong that it appears to absorb the personal life—to leave no room for the individual wants. It reaches its climax in the Son of Man, in whom the identity between the sufferer and the spectator is so pronounced that He can say of the calamities of life, "Inasmuch as they did it unto the least of my brethren they have done it unto me."[2]

3. Jeremiah is "the man of sorrows" of the Old Testament; and in not a few respects he strikingly resembles the Man of Sorrows of the New. Both were without honour in their own country and in their own house; for, as the people of Nazareth attempted to cast Jesus down from the hill on which their city

[1] A. Whyte. [2] G. Matheson.

was built, so the men of Anathoth plotted against Jeremiah's life; and, as he says, even his brethren and the house of his father dealt treacherously with him. Both were opposed by the representatives of religion in their day—Jeremiah by the priests and prophets, Jesus by the Pharisees and scribes. Both wept over the city of Jerusalem with passionate love, and the zeal of God's house did eat them up; yet both were considered traitors to their country and blasphemers of the Temple; both were scourged; and, if tradition is true, both were put to death by their own countrymen.

¶ There is a melancholy that enervates, but there is one also that tempers fine souls to keenness and action. It is easy to discriminate the weak sentimentality of Sterne from true, noble pathos that does not nurse its tears, but wipes them away that it may see to help. Jesus wept, but what succour followed! The life of Lazarus was the result in one case, His own death as a ransom in the other.[1]

iv. His Anger.

1. Gentle and trustful, Jeremiah seemed no match for the open violence or secret treachery which he again and again encountered. And yet through his long ministry of forty years he faced his foes with that loftiest courage which triumphs over nature, rebuked his people with relentless severity, and contradicted their dearest prejudices. There is no wrath so terrible as the "wrath of the Lamb," and Jeremiah's wrath was of that type.

¶ The characteristic features in Jeremiah's individuality are a passionate intensity and stern veracity mingled with pathetic, almost feminine, tenderness, a capacity for indignant invective, with occasional fits of diffidence and self-distrust which make him, as a "human document," one of the most engaging figures in history. In the "confession of Jeremiah" and the memorials of his life contained in his own writings, supplemented by his friend and faithful disciple Baruch, we have, as Professor Cheyne says, a most "fascinating psychical problem." Gentle in his general bearing, he becomes at times vehement when harassed by open and secret dangers; as a young man disillusionized at his birthplace Anathoth, the city of priests, by the sight of priestly corruption, later on arriving at Jerusalem, like Luther at Rome, he is struck with horror by worse sins perpetrated at the sacred

[1] John Ker, *Thoughts for Heart and Life*, 125.

shrine, the centre of piety, at the very threshold of the Holy of Holies; in the further course of his restless career a natural disposition to pessimistic views gathers strength. He is "the man that hath seen affliction." But his pessimism never becomes that of rage and resentment, as in Schopenhauer; it is modified by the religious sense of dutiful resignation to the Divine will. His feeling of utter loneliness in the crowd of unsympathetic countrymen saddens his soul, and with the quick sensibility of a refined mind he shrinks from contact with the crimes and sins he witnesses in the city, in the court, in the sanctuary. What he sees and suffers, however, does not produce a sour misanthropy. Unlike Schopenhauer, he does not dwell with savage delight on the depraved worthlessness and abject meanness of his fellow-men. His enemies furnish him with sufficient ground for scorn and distrust, and the depressing influences of his environment produce occasionally doubts and misgivings as to his own mission in those strange words: "Wilt thou indeed be unto me a deceitful *brook*, as waters that be not sure?" (xv. 18, R.V. margin). But from such temporary attacks of sceptical pessimism he recovers quickly and listens to the reassuring voice, which bids him stand forth as a "brazen wall" against all opposition and assures him of Divine support.[1]

2. We should have been glad to think that he endured his persecution with meekness and patience and forgiveness. We can hardly, indeed, be surprised that he bemoans his hard lot, or even curses the day of his birth. Many a Christian man's faith has failed him, and in moments of despair he has wished that he had never been born. When Jeremiah challenges the justice of God's government, or even complains that he has been deceived and deluded, we can sympathize with the human despair and weariness which for the moment loses its hold on God, and sinks exhausted and hopeless. But we are startled, nay, horror-struck, to hear his bitter curses against his persecutors, his passionate invocations of Divine vengeance upon them. They reach a terrible climax in chap. xviii. 19 ff.: "Give heed to me, O Lord, and hearken to the voice of them that contend with me. Shall evil be recompensed for good? for they have digged a pit for my soul. Remember how I stood before thee to speak good for them, to turn away thy fury from them. Therefore deliver up their children to the famine, and give them over to the power of the sword; and let their

[1] M. Kaufmann, in *The Expositor*, 6th Ser., ix. 188.

wives become childless, and widows; and let their men be slain of death, and their young men smitten of the sword in battle. . . . Yet, Lord, thou knowest all their counsel against me to slay me; forgive not their iniquity, neither blot out their sin from thy sight: but let them be overthrown before thee: deal thou with them in the time of thine anger."

Let it be granted that some personal vindictiveness was mingled with these imprecations. But there was a far deeper meaning in them. They were—in however imperfect a way—the expression of a desire for the triumph of righteousness, for the manifestation of God's justice in the world. We must remember how keenly the prophet felt that his cause was God's cause, and that his enemies were God's enemies; that God's honour was at stake to defend and vindicate His prophet, and prove his opponents to be utterly in the wrong; while in those times the idea of future rectification and redress of the wrongs of this world was hardly, if at all, entertained, and godly men longed to see God's righteous judgment visibly manifested in this present life.

¶ However they phrased it, what the early Evangelicals meant by "the wrath of God" was the plain, incontestable fact that the universe turns a very ugly face towards sin, towards wrong being and wrong doing. The state of things brought always the worst consequences, now and always. To get a man out of that was worth some strong language. When a man is in a wrong and dangerous position, a thorough shaking up, even by wholesome terror, may be the best thing for him. He will do things then that surprise himself. Tell a man who says he cannot move a step farther that within six yards of him lies a mine of dynamite that will explode in five minutes and he will run like a deer. Well that he can! There is a moral condition, that of millions to-day, where nothing but a good fright will rouse. And if you put "hell and damnation" for all that system of things which punishes guilt and the abandonment of the good, are the words too strong? It is hell and damnation, and those early Evangelicals knew it and said it. And the medicine griped and worked.[1]

v. His Sense of Destiny.

1. In the very moment of his call, Jeremiah learnt that he was a child of destiny. His choice for his great work was no hap-

[1] J. Brierley, *Faith's Certainties* (1914), 161.

hazard selection from the mass, as if all were equally fitted for the use of the Almighty, to whom the human imperfection meant no limitation. Nor had God's choice rested on him after he had displayed his quality. Even before his begetting, God had planned his life and had thus created him with the deliberate design of appointing him a prophet to the nations. Hence God lays stress on His own participation in his origin, since He would have him learn how He had Himself prepared him for his mission. The special line of ancestry from which he had come, the home into which he had been born, the conditions which had moulded him during his impressionable years, may be regarded as elements in this preparation; but the main stress lies on the nature with which God had endowed him and the personal experience of religion which we can detect in his earlier life.

¶ The idea that Yahweh forms a man in his mother's womb is often worked out with wonder and astonishment by the later writers. But Yahweh "knew" Jeremiah before He made him in his mother's womb. This idea is an advance on the other, and reminds us of the προέγνω of Rom. viii. 29. Yahweh knew beforehand what might and should become of the child whom He would give to Hilkiah. He needed a special instrument for the future; He did not wait till the time when the man was required and choose him then out of the available material; long ere that the image or, as a Greek would say, the idea of the person He would employ stood before Him and served as the model for what He formed. To this we must add that in the circumstances and character of the priestly family at Anathoth He saw the opportunity for carrying out His lofty purpose. According to Ex. xxxiii. 12 Yahweh knows Moses "by name." Moses has specially attracted His attention, so that He notices him more than others, occupies Himself with his person, and ultimately calls him. Amos is taken from following the sheep. Isaiah is submitted to a sort of test and then offers himself for the service. But Jeremiah, before he came into existence, was a thought of God's, pre-existed in God's Spirit, was specially created by Him for a great mission. That is an imposing thought, a deeply impressive idea![1]

2. However it be, it is certainly the case that it is a source of comfort and power to us to think that not now for the first time has God thought of us, or is making use of us; but that we have

[1] B. Duhm, in *The Expository Times*, xiii. 72.

been in His mind for long, always indeed, even from the beginning. When, for instance, we are in something like the position of this prophet, undertaking a serious responsibility, and can recall things in our history which we cannot but regard as providential, determining our course of life, and leading us on towards the place which we are going to occupy, it does strengthen our hope that God is now calling us to the place. The things we remember may be small, indeed trifles; but when we take a particular view of life, they acquire greater magnitude. Our minds were, perhaps, fixed on a certain career in life; but in order to pursue it, it was necessary that we should gain some distinction in learning, or obtain some position, and we failed; and the failure altered our whole career: and now we are where we are, about to enter upon a calling more sacred. Providences of this kind, being internal, strike us more readily; and reflecting on them does enable us to find God in our life. Indeed, though we ordinarily overlook such things from want of thought, when we are led more seriously to consider our history, we find it full of them.

¶ We need to deepen the sense of our own direct personal connexion with God as His messengers. We are tempted to regard the commission to declare the Gospel as something which has been officially handed down from age to age. We shrink from acknowledging that it is in each case a Divine voice addressed to the individual soul. I would not indeed underrate for one moment the value of the historic filiation which connects us with the first envoys of Christ and gives authority to our ministry. But there is also something more than this. God whispers His call, eternal and unchangeable, and yet always personal and new, to every one of us. We openly confess that we "trust that we are inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon us our office," that "we think, in our hearts, that we are truly called" to the ministry of His Church. The words are not vain words. God gives to each priest in His Church—and to this office you all look forward—a peculiar charge. The sentence spoken to each newly-ordained deacon, "Take thou authority to read the Gospel in the Church of God, and also to preach the same," lifts you above yourselves, above the misgivings of your own experience, above the littleness of your own hopes. Welcome it in every hour of loneliness as a sure sign that God is speaking still, speaking to you, and through you; that He has not left the world which He created and redeemed; that He orders the

spiritual course of your lives; that He prepares for you a service which you—you alone—can render, and an utterance which you—you alone—can deliver.[1]

vi. His Likeness to Christ.

1. When all men pondered on the person of Jesus there were some who said He was John the Baptist come to life again. Others said He was Elijah. But there were others, and these not the least discerning, who proclaimed Him to be Jeremiah. Now the very mention of that name in this connexion proves that this neglected, persecuted, lonely prophet has in the end of the day come to his own. If the men of his own generation despised him, the men of that late time honoured him above all his fellows. It is easy to understand why the names of the Baptist and of Elijah should be fixed upon: the one was but recently dead, and his life and message had stirred the nation to the heart, and his martyrdom had crowned his testimony with glory; what wonder that, when men saw Jesus with the same fearless righteousness, with the same scorn of consequences, they should have concluded this was none other than the Baptist risen from the dead? And all expected Elijah to come again to make ready the way of the Messiah; prophecy had predicted his coming. He stood forth in history clothed with supernatural power; and when they saw the mighty works of Jesus and were moved by the authority of His words, it was a reasonable conjecture to identify him with Elijah. But why should others call Jesus Jeremiah?

2. What likeness may we trace between them?

(1) For one thing, they *were brought near each other in the times in which they lived.*—Jeremiah was a prophet in the dying days of Jewish monarchy. He saw the last king who sat on the throne of Israel. He lived through those awful days when Jerusalem was besieged and destroyed, when the people were carried away into captivity, and the land was left desolate. Jesus appeared at a like critical time in the history of the Jewish people. He too had to tell His disciples, who were lost in admiration of the grandeur of the Temple, that the time was at hand when not one stone would be left standing on another. The fall of the

[1] B. F. Westcott, *Peterborough Sermons*, 283.

Temple and the Holy City occupies all the foreground of the future into which Jesus gazed. His words dwell continually on these imminent events. They were not to take place till some forty years after His death; but many of those listening to Him were to be spared to see them. When they came, they were to be found big with meaning; they meant the dying of a religion; they involved the passing of an epoch. Men who lived when Jeremiah lived, and when Jesus lived, were on the eve of a new age. It was a sad day for the patriot. The glory of their land was to suffer eclipse. Unparalleled suffering was to be the portion of their countrymen. And it made the pain all the greater that, while these two saw clearly the coming of doom, all other eyes were blinded to the terrible issues. Therefore it was that they were both patriots of the broken heart. They knew what it was to nurse a hidden grief, and to shed bitter and unavailing tears over the city of their fathers, and the land that gave them birth. It enhances to us the worth of the gospel to remember that it came into being amid such commotions. Jeremiah saw the State perish, the Temple destroyed, the Holy City ruined; but he saw religion purified and strengthened. It came forth out of the fire refined. Jesus saw Temple and ritual about to pass away, the forms of worship consecrated by hoary associations become effete; but the gospel and a spiritual faith, and a worship not tied to holy places nor ancient rites, came, in the midst of these convulsions, to a glorious birth.

(2) For another thing, Jesus and Jeremiah *were brought near to one another in their experience.*—Of all the prophets, Jeremiah was most eminent for his sufferings. He is ever seen to be a man bearing his cross. His life was one long martyrdom. He stood alone, persecuted, suspected. The powers that be were allied against him. After the death of King Josiah he had to stand continual opposition and hatred. His enemies had it in their hearts to kill him, though their hands were restrained from this act of murder. Chief among those ranged against him were the religious classes of his day; priests and prophets were in league against Jeremiah: to such he was an arch-heretic, and his doctrine was opposed to truth and fatal to religion. Now it is because of all this that his is the life "that unto Christ's has most resemblance." If you were to point to the Old Testament passage that

most fully foreshadowed Christ, you would without hesitation point to the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah: that moving picture of the Servant of God who was "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief."

(3) They also *come near to one another in their teaching.*—Jeremiah is the prophet of the New Covenant. He looked for a religion that is to have neither holy place, nor privileged priesthood, nor cumbrous ritual, but wherein the grace of God shall be all in all, and every one shall enjoy immediate fellowship with the God of all mercy. He lived amid a generation that had an idolatrous reverence for the Temple and external rites, but he made nothing of these things; he set true and undefiled religion in the doing of righteousness; he had no care for sacrifices and outward forms; he made everything of the law written on the heart. He saw the Temple destroyed and the holy place profaned and sacrifices cease; but he did not identify religion with these things, nor did he fear that when these perished, religion perished also. Now in all this he anticipated Christianity; in such teaching we breathe "the ample ether, the diviner air" of the Gospels. Jeremiah prepared the way for the great doctrine, "The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth." It is because in the New Covenant there is neither sacrifice nor ritual, but only God's forgiveness of our sins and our communion with the God who has forgiven us, and our obedience from the heart to all His holy will, that Christ tells us it is sealed by His death. That is the religion to which the Saviour introduces us. What Jeremiah foreshadowed is now realized; what was for him a mere outline is now embodied in the faith of Christ. There was not a little in the accents of Jesus that reminded men who heard with an understanding heart of the voice of Jeremiah.

¶ Am reading Jeremiah at present at family worship. What richness of metaphor and of feeling; what heart-broken eloquence; what a noble, weeping, wrestling, divine soul he was! His tears came down large, electric, like the first drops of a thunder-cloud. He is not so picturesque, but he is fully as eloquent as Isaiah. He has no passage so powerful as some in that prophet: but he is as a whole not inferior. He is the Demosthenes of sorrow, and often, too, of Philippic fire—with all his vehemence and intensity, but with far more poetry.[1]

[1] *George Gilfillan: Letters and Journals, with Memoir*, 328.

JEREMIAH.

III.

Jeremiah's Creed.

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Jeremiah's Creed.

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute judgement and justice in the land. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, The Lord is our righteousness.—Jer. xxiii. 5, 6.

The statement, now generally accepted, that the prophets were preachers rather than theologians, is as true of Jeremiah as of any of their number. By his creed, therefore, is meant, not a system of doctrine taught by him as such, but the aggregate, in a more scientific form of presentation, of the principles that constitute or underlie his prophetic teaching.

1. It will be well, first, to take some notice of the connexion or contrast between Jeremiah's teaching and that of earlier or contemporary prophets.

Isaiah was the first to make prophecy a real force in politics, and he also defined politics as the sphere in which prophecy might most fitly be exercised. Amos thundered forth his relentless denunciations in a single message which, though not wholly destitute of references to the political atmosphere, is yet in the main quite indifferent to the general movements of international life. To Hosea the utter rottenness of the intrigues of the ruling class is so apparent that he longs for a time when there shall be no alliances and no politics at all. But Isaiah was a politician in the highest and noblest sense, and subsequent prophets followed his example. We have a significant instance of this alteration of the prophetic standpoint in the works of Jeremiah, whose temperament singularly resembles that of Hosea, and whose environment constitutes an equally remarkable parallel to that of his Northern predecessor. Both witnessed the decline and fall of their country, but, while Hosea may almost be said to hail the prospect in so far as the destruction of the old would involve the

possibility of an entirely new start, Jeremiah consistently labours in every possible way for the preservation of the Jewish State. His almost monotonous persistence in a course of political interference resulted in his being regarded as a menace to the welfare of the State—so little was his policy appreciated by those in authority. Like Isaiah, he urged the people to accept their circumstances as interpreting the will of God. Like Isaiah, he recognized that the sins of the nation cried for punishment. Like Isaiah, he saw in the power that oppressed and finally destroyed Judah an instrument in the hand of Israel's God. Like Isaiah, he advised submission to a nation which his own country was powerless to withstand. Like Isaiah, he knew how to rebuke kings and princes, how to oppose popular fears and popular aspirations. And all his teaching, embodying as it did marvellous conceptions of the transcendent spirituality of God, was not couched in the language of abstract propositions, but was translated into the common speech of everyday life, and brought into closest correlation with contemporary politics.

2. The great theological value of Jeremiah lies in the fact that he gave an impulse to those spiritual conceptions which appeared first definitely in the Book of Deuteronomy. Hosea and Isaiah had insisted that outward religious observances were useless, and even detestable to God, without a righteous life. Jeremiah further contended that conduct and character are themselves the outcome of an inward religious principle. There was to be an inward circumcision of the heart, which God would recognize as the only true circumcision. Thus the great Kingdom of Messiah would be signalized by a New Covenant based upon a law written not on tables, but in the heart. In this Kingdom outside nations would be lovingly welcomed, a promise which suggests that there is a latent relationship between all nations and Jehovah. Jeremiah therefore, more than any other of the prophets, justified their description as "the spiritual destroyers of old Israel." For he most of all stands out as the harbinger of that new order which was to succeed to the old that was "nigh unto vanishing away," an order which was to know no national or material restriction, but was to be characterized by the universal indwelling of the Spirit of God. If Hosea in teaching the love of God anticipated

the chief tenet of Christian theology, Jeremiah may be said, in his insistence on an inward and spiritual motive, to have predicted the fundamental truth of Christian ethics.

¶ If for political and public purposes there can be in the Bible one book more valuable than another to throw light on the days we live in it is Jeremiah. He was not always "looking to the sun," but he was looking to the earth, entreating, preaching, warning, threatening, promising; and he was in consequence regarded as a bore and a blunderer. Yet, if he had been attended to, Jerusalem might have survived for many centuries; and certainly she would have been spared the indescribable sufferings of soul and body that followed her destruction by Nebuchadnezzar.[1]

I.

The Nature of God.

1. To Jeremiah, as to his predecessors, the God of Israel is supreme. The question has been raised whether the prophet was a speculative or a practical monotheist; in other words, had he completely broken with the conception which had prevailed in his nation up to his day? That conception was that the gods worshipped by Israel's neighbours, such as Milcom, Chemosh, etc., were really existent, and that the relation of Jehovah to these was merely that of a God of immensely superior power, who might be trusted to protect His people within the boundaries of the land, but whose omnipresence and claims to universal allegiance were not yet recognized. Whatever answer Jeremiah would have made to such a question, it is plain that he considered the heathen deities as at least *practically* non-existent, and that Jehovah demanded the homage of all the world. The gods of the nations are vanities. Jehovah is the Source of life. Every one severed from Him is brought to shame. He is One who tries the reins and the heart, this utterance being directed against those who maintained that it was only the outward conduct and due performance of ritual that mattered. And it follows from this that Jehovah is omniscient. As demanding universal obedience, He compels all nations to drink the cup of His wrath. In fact, so far

[1] Lord Shaftesbury, in *Life*, by E. Hodder, iii. 454.

was Jeremiah from believing, as Ahaz, for example, had believed, that the conquests of Assyria and Babylon were due to the superior power of the deities whom they worshipped, that he maintained that the secret of the success attained by those empires was only that they were the instruments employed by Jehovah for the chastisement of His guilty people.

¶ I was complaining to St. Francis one day of a great injury which had been done to me. "I have no oil," he said, "to pour into your wound, and, indeed, were I to affect to sympathize with you, it might only increase the pain of the wound you have received. I have nothing but vinegar and cleansing salt to pour in, and I must simply put in practice the command of the Apostle: 'Reprove, entreat.' . . . It is a fine thing, indeed, for you to complain to an earthly father, you, who ought to be saying with David to your heavenly Father: 'I was dumb and I opened not my mouth, because thou hast done it.' 'But,' you will say, 'it is not God but wicked men who have done this to me!' Ah, indeed! and do you forget that it is what is called the permissive will of God which makes use of malice of men, either to correct you or to exercise you in virtue? Job says: 'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away.' He does not say: The devil and the thieves took my goods and my dear ones from me: he sees only the hand of God which does all these things by such instruments as it pleases Him to use."[1]

2. It was not the manner of Hebrew writers to argue for the existence of God, or elaborately to define Him. They had little concern with speculative problems, and even the godless scorners who said "There is no God" were guilty not of theoretical but of practical atheism. The task of their prophets and lawgivers was not to give them a firmer assurance of the reality of the God they worshipped, but to insist that the deities they set by His side were unrealities, and to purify their worship from materialistic and immoral elements. To this Jeremiah forms no exception. His own sense of God was so immediate and convincing, his consciousness of intimate fellowship so clear, that he would have been under even less temptation to doubt His existence than those who had derived their belief only from unquestioned tradition. The urgent questions were rather those suggested by the heathen tendencies of his countrymen, the recog-

[1] J. P. Camus, *The Spirit of St. Francis de Sales* (ed. 1910), 168.

nition of Canaanite and foreign deities, the assimilation of Jehovah to them, the disbelief in His moral government. Whether we should speak of Jeremiah as a speculative monotheist may be debated. But practically his position was indistinguishable from monotheism. The gods of the heathen are no gods, they are vanities. Jehovah fills heaven and earth; none can elude His vigilance. He is the God of nature, who has set the sand as a bound of the sea; its mutinous waves may toss and roar, but their chafing at His curb is all in vain. He gives the rains in their season and harvest at the appointed time. He is the God of history; all nations, even the mightiest, are at His disposal and the instruments of His will. His character is to be inferred rather from His government of the world and His attitude to the conduct of His people than from the definite statements made by the prophet, though these are not wholly wanting. A characteristic utterance is, "I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgement, and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight." With all the assertions of His sternness towards sin, there is constant reference to His goodness, grace, and readiness to forgive.

(1) *Jehovah is the God of Israel.*—If Jeremiah has not the eye for the glories of nature possessed by some of the other writers of Scripture, he is surpassed by none in setting forth God's love to His chosen people. His was a hidden and brooding nature; he was full of suppressed fire and passion; he was without wife or children, and the whole force of his affections was given to his country. Sometimes his love took the form of jealousy and indignation, but it was love all the same; and it enabled him to understand the love of God and to be the organ through which the Divine heart found expression. No prophet, unless it be Hosea—also a nature of the brooding and passionate type—equals him in the lyrical tenderness of outbursts like this: "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee"; and he is never weary of repeating the story of the ancient time of what he calls the espousals of Jehovah and Israel, when Jehovah brought forth His "people Israel out of the land of Egypt with signs, and with wonders, and with a strong hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with great terror," and gave them the land which He had sworn "to their fathers to give them, a land flowing with milk and honey." No prophet is so

conscious of the splendid chance which Israel thus obtained, because to be thus brought nigh to God was to be close to "the fountain of living waters"; and, had the nation realized its privilege, it would have been like "a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit."

(2) *He is also the God of the nations.*—Jeremiah had an express commission to the nations as well as to Israel. He speaks of a book of prophecies against the nations, some part at least of which is incorporated in the extant Book of Jeremiah. His message to the nations was in the main, as it was to Israel, a message of judgment. It was an epoch of judgment for the world, and Nebuchadnezzar was the Divine agent in its execution. "Lo, I begin to work evil at the city which is called by my name, and should ye be utterly unpunished? Ye shall not be unpunished: for I will call for a sword upon all the inhabitants of the earth, saith the Lord of hosts. . . . The Lord hath a controversy with the nations, he will plead with all flesh; as for the wicked, he will give them to the sword." Nebuchadnezzar is Jehovah's servant: into his power He has given the kingdoms of the world, for He as their Creator claims the sovereign right to dispose their destinies. And all the nations must serve Nebuchadnezzar, and his son, and his son's son, until the time of his own land come. But that day will come, a day of retribution for Babylon's heartless violence; and the book of the prophecies against the nations closes with a triumphant vision of vengeance on the great oppressor Babylon, who shall sink, and not rise again.

In his original call God had expressly designated Jeremiah "a prophet unto the nations," thus indicating that his word was intended not only for Israel but also for the neighbouring peoples. How far this may have influenced the prophet's way of life, we cannot tell with precision. One would like to know whether he travelled among the neighbouring nations, in the exercise of his vocation, as Jonah went to Nineveh; but the indications are not sufficient to determine. At all events, he did not forget the extent of his call. He looked across the frontiers of his own country, and took the deepest interest in the condition and the

fortunes of the neighbouring States. The extent of his information about some of them, especially Moab, would almost lead us to conclude that he had been there.

(3) *Jeremiah's God was a righteous God.*—In an appeal to God, when hard pressed by the people of Anathoth, he addresses Him as "Jehovah of hosts, who judgest righteously." In another passage he makes Jehovah Himself say that "judgment and righteousness" are among the things in which He especially delights; and in a third he represents Him as asking, "What unrighteousness have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me?" True, the prophet seems sometimes to have questioned the correctness of his own teaching on this subject. In xii. 1 he feels himself impelled to protest, "Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? wherefore are all they at ease that deal very treacherously?" But he introduces this protest with a confession that Jehovah always vindicates Himself when His righteousness is questioned, and in xvii. 10 he endorses the Divine declaration, "I, the Lord, search the heart, I try the reins; even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings."

¶ The words, the many words, in which, directly or indirectly, Jesus speaks of God's Righteousness are no less wholesome than those in which He speaks of God's Love. They may not be quite as pleasant to us, but they are none the less wholesome on that account; it is neither the most agreeable food, nor the least disagreeable medicine, that is always the best for us. What Jesus tells us concerning the Love of God, needs to be accompanied by what He tells us of His Righteousness, in order that our boldness and confidence may be checked by reverence and godly fear. It is true that "perfect love casteth out fear"; and, when our love is perfect, we shall be and have a right to be entirely free from fear; but as long as our love is imperfect—and who does not feel that it is very imperfect?—fear has its place, and its office, and its power. "He that feareth is not made perfect in love"; and, consequently, he that is not made perfect in love feareth. It is not the fear that is wrong, but the imperfectness of the love. We need to know and remember both the Love and the Righteousness of God. Were His Love alone revealed, we might think sin a matter of indifference; were His Righteousness alone proclaimed, we should feel salvation to be impossible: in the one case we should presume, in the other despair; in the one God might be

regarded by us as a foolishly lenient and indulgent parent, in the other as a hard and exacting master. Let us be thankful for both the revelations which, in their combined effect, cannot but produce the happiest result, in the wholesome confidence and equally wholesome reverence which they will teach us to cherish towards our Loving and Righteous Father.[1]

II.

The Guilt of Sin.

1. Like Hosea, Jeremiah uses the figures of marriage and sonship to describe the closeness of Israel's relation to Jehovah, and the duties implied in that relationship. "I remember for thee the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals; how thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown." "I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn." But Israel had forsaken Jehovah, and chosen other gods; and false belief had led to a deep-seated and inveterate moral degeneracy.

(1) The sin to which Jeremiah most frequently refers, and which he obviously regards as the origin and fountain of all the rest, is *idolatry*.

There is no truer maxim than "Like God, like worshipper." A nation cannot in its own character rise above the Being to whom it looks up as the ideal of greatness and goodness. It may be possible to believe in a holy God and yet live in unholiness; but it is not possible to worship Baal and the Queen of Heaven and yet remain pure and good. Therefore Jeremiah was justified in placing the worship of such deities in the forefront of his attack on contemporary morals and in treating the condition of his countrymen as hopeless as long as they failed to apply their minds to know the true God. Idolatry was openly practised in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem; the very Temple had been polluted; Jerusalem had been defiled with the abominations of human sacrifices; and it would seem that these horrors had actually been defended as pleasing to Jehovah, for He has expressly to disclaim ever having given such a commandment.

[1] *Hugh Stowell Brown: Autobiography and Commonplace-Book*, 388.

The people fancied that they could unite these idolatries with the worship of Jehovah, utterly failing to recognize that He was a "jealous God," who would not tolerate a divided allegiance, no, not for a moment.

¶ Are Hindoos more deeply devoted to their idolatry than Englishmen are to *theirs*? If Englishmen could abandon the worship and service of the only living idol, they would find it comparatively easy to get the Heathen to cast their dead idols to the moles and to the bats. But if the authority of the grand idol (self) were to be repudiated in favour of pure Christianity (self-sacrifice), what would become of English society? From centre to circumference, would it not break up, and be no more? If self-will were slain, English society would be found (in much the same condition as a man with his back bone taken out), not bordering on chaos, but chaos itself. It would be Genesis over again: "In the beginning English society was without form and void." I will not bring down on me the curses of all Englishmen, by saying that a totally new beginning of this sort is desirable; and yet if one had the opportunity, it might be well to whisper into the ear of each, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, thine own self-will is the bar that threatens to separate thee from the Life of Jesus, which is the Eternal Life.[1]

(2) *Corruption* in religion had borne fruit in corruption of conduct. Faithlessness and falsehood, injustice and covetousness, violence and murder, were universal. Jerusalem was like Sodom in the days of Lot. There was no salt of righteousness in her to preserve her.

One specimen may be given. When the invading army was before the walls of Jerusalem, the king, the nobles, and the wealthy agreed to manumit their slaves of Hebrew birth. This may have been in obedience to a summons from Jeremiah, or it may have been for military reasons; but at least it was in propitiation for a transgression of which they were sensible. The law ordained that a Hebrew or Hebrewess could not be held in bondage for more than six years, but must be set free in the seventh year. This law had been allowed to fall into desuetude, and the wealthy were keeping their own flesh and blood in perpetual bondage. The resolution to enfranchise was taken with great solemnity: there was a meeting in the Temple, with the king at the head of his people; in accordance with an ancient custom an

[1] J. Pulsford, *Quiet Hours*, ii. 48.

animal was slaughtered, and those who were entering into the agreement, or "covenant," as they called it, passed between the pieces of the divided carcase, the meaning of this symbolic action being, "Such be the fate of him who breaks this covenant." Yet when, soon after, through the departure of the Babylonian army to meet an Egyptian force which had appeared on the southern border, the danger seemed to be at an end, they recalled their action and reasserted their rights over their servants. Anything more cynically defiant of both the honour due to God and the rights of man, it would be impossible to conceive; and Jeremiah indignantly spoke out his mind about it, declaring that those who would not allow their brethren to be delivered were themselves delivered over to sword, famine, and pestilence.

¶ Dear friends and brethren, in all your words, in all your business and employment, have a care of breaking your words and promises to any people; but that you may consider beforehand, whether you may be able to perform and fulfil both your words and promises, that your yea be yea, and nay, nay in all things; which Christ hath set up instead of an oath and swearing.[1]

¶ Nietzsche would define man as an animal that can make and keep promises. He sees the real nobility of man in his capacity for promising something, answering for himself and undertaking a responsibility—since man, with the mastery of himself which this capacity implies, necessarily acquires in addition a mastery over external circumstances and over other creatures, whose will is not so lasting. The consciousness of this responsibility is what the sovereign man calls his conscience.[2]

2. No prophetic exhortation could convince them of their sin. No chastisement could bring them to repentance. When judgment fell upon them they would ask, with an air of injured innocence, "Wherefore hath the Lord our God done all these things unto us?" They were incorrigible, and nothing was left but to write Judah's epitaph: "This is the nation that hath not hearkened to the voice of the Lord their God, nor received instruction: truth is perished, and is cut off from their mouth." Therefore nothing remains but judgment. The city and nation must be swept away. The old order must be destroyed that a new one may arise in its place; death is the only hope of life.

[1] George Fox, *Works*, viii. 219.
[2] George Brandes, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, 32.

Yet Jeremiah seldom uttered a warning without at the same time showing how the impending danger could be averted. He promised his people deliverance, personal and national, on the simple condition that they returned to their allegiance to Jehovah. He did not, however, often put the terms into this succinct form. He usually dwelt now on one, and now on another, of the various stages of feeling or details of conduct which such a change of relation implied or involved. He saw, for example, that it was necessary for the Jews first of all to recognize the wrongness of their actual bearing and actions. He therefore supplements a declaration that Jehovah is waiting to show mercy to them with the exhortation, "Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the Lord thy God, and hast scattered thy ways to the strangers under every green tree, and ye have not obeyed my voice, saith the Lord." He himself, in his plea for Jerusalem and Judah, confesses their sins: "We acknowledge, O Lord, our wickedness and the iniquity of our fathers: for we have sinned against thee." The recognition of guilt naturally produces penitence. The prophet therefore expects his people to show signs of contrition in view of their offences. He says that he listened in vain for tokens of this sort from Judah: "No man repenteth him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done?" On the other hand, he anticipates the day when Ephraim will say, "Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a calf unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God. Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh; I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth."

¶ Repentance works; it affects the active powers; it touches the will. The awakened sinner, finding himself in the path of transgressors, stops, and turns his face towards the way of life. He hears the voice which speaks from heaven, "Break off thy sins by righteousness"; he endeavours to keep the law of God. Pharnaces, while still in revolt against Cæsar, sent to him a golden crown. Cæsar sternly refused the gift. "Let Pharnaces," said he, "return to his obedience." The war between the Northern and Southern States of America was not ended until General Lee laid his sword down on the grass at General Grant's feet, in the orchard at Appomattox, saying, as he looked up to the banner of

the stars and stripes floating overhead, "We will never take up arms against the old flag again." And the long controversy between the soul and God cannot be brought to a termination until the soul, subdued and penitent, exclaim, "I have sinned and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not." "You say that you have come to Christ," says Bunyan; "then, tell me what have you come from?"

Repentance, if it be true, seeks also to repair the wrong done, to undo the past, to make restitution, to "cut off the entail of sin." Claud Harms, contrasting the penitential exercises of the Middle Ages with the easy indifference to wrong-doing displayed by many in his time, says somewhere, almost with bitterness, "In earlier times, at any rate, forgiveness cost something; now men simply forgive themselves." "Go in peace," said the Lord to an awakened sinner. Then He added, "Go, and sin no more."

When the path of repentance is once entered on, the sinner is surprised to find how easy it is, and how pleasant. He thought that it was a perilous ascent to where the storm-winds raged unceasingly; a sharp, cruel road strewn with branching thorns, and filled with stones like knives; a painful progress with bleeding feet and toiling breath. Instead, he finds it a calm and peaceful way. Luther confessed to Staupitz that the word repentance, which he formerly thought the most terrifying word in the Bible, was now the most gracious. And Bengel says, "Repentance is a joyful gift." The waters of Marah have been sweetened by the tree of healing.[1]

3. In his treatment of sin it was Jeremiah's constant effort to reach the individual, to arouse the individual sense of guilt. He continually emphasized the fact that each member of the nation was guilty—that it was just because there was "none righteous, no, not one," that the whole body of society was regarded as guilty before the Lord. "The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead the dough, to make cakes to the queen of heaven." "Ye have done evil more than your fathers; for, behold, ye walk every one after the stubbornness of his evil heart, so that ye hearken not unto me." It was because all had sinned, all were guilty, that no hope for Jerusalem remained. Sometimes Jeremiah probes more deeply into the very nature of sin. He shows how firmly it is rooted in the human heart: "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard

[1] D. M. McIntyre, in *Foundation Truths of the Gospel*, 118.

his spots? then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil." And yet the blame must not be laid at the door of God, the Author of human nature; for this corruption is simply the result of long habit: "They have taught their tongue to speak lies; they weary themselves to commit iniquity. Thine habitation is in the midst of deceit; through deceit they refuse to know me, saith the Lord." And so Jeremiah cries aloud the great truth that he has discovered in his own life: "I the Lord search the heart . . . even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings." It was in reality the death-blow to the whole doctrine of national religion, national responsibility, and it contained the promise of something far higher and more spiritual. The well-known proverb was become a lie, and Jeremiah proclaimed the lie aloud: "In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge. But every one shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eateth the sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge."

The earlier prophets had laid down the essential principles of religion, had made religion a matter of ethics, of holy love, and of moral faith, and had no doubt exemplified these qualities in their own private life. But they did not apparently look upon their own experience of religion as sufficiently important to be worthy of a place in their recorded utterances. Religion with them seems to have been primarily a national affair. It was Jeremiah who first gave to it the personal note. It was he who first made the soul of the individual the true seat of religion. But this does not mean that he gave up the national point of view. Through all his ministry he continued to address himself to the nation as such. It simply means that he made the conception of religion deeper and more inward. He made its essential nature consist in personal fellowship with God. This implies the ascription of new importance to the individual. It also implies that true religion is not a matter of race, but is as broad as humanity itself. But Jeremiah does not specially concern himself with these implications. He leaves them to be worked out by his two great successors. What he is himself specially interested in is the actual, vital experience of God. And this he finds in himself, in his own soul. He, as Duhm says, "first discovered the soul and its significance for religion."

¶ Forty years afterwards, Augustin, in his *Confessions*, pondered this slight ordinary fact of his birth, which happened almost unnoticed by the inhabitants of Thagaste, and in truth it seems to him a great event, not because it concerns himself, bishop and Father of the Church, but because it is a soul which at this imperceptible point of time comes into the world.

Let me clearly understand Augustin's thought. Souls have been ransomed by a Victim of infinite value. They have themselves an infinite value. Nothing which goes on in them can be ignored. Their most trifling sins, their feeblest stirrings towards virtue, are vital for the eternity of their lot. All shall be attributed to them by the just Judge. The theft of an apple will weigh perhaps as heavily in the scales as the seizure of a province or a kingdom. The evil of sin is in the evil intention. Now the fate of a soul, created by God, on Him depends. Hence everything in a human life assumes an extreme seriousness and importance. In the history of a creature, all is worthy of being examined, weighed, studied, and perhaps also, for the edification of others, told.[1]

III.

The New Covenant.

Jeremiah's preoccupation with the heart as the source of conduct, his change of the centre of gravity from the outward to the inward, forced him into such an individualism in his conception of sin as we find in his portrayal of the moral and spiritual ideal in his doctrine of the New Covenant.

1. Jeremiah's prophecy, everywhere aiming at a spiritualizing and deepening of the Church's relation to God, here reaches its climax, where in one word the termination of the entire economy of the Old Covenant is announced. The prophet foresees a "*New Covenant*," by which the one resting on the fundamental fact of the Exodus from Egypt and announced in the lawgiving on Sinai is "made old." Thus the Kingdom of God is built anew from the very ground.

¶ There is much reason for supposing that it was in his time of seclusion that Jeremiah's eyes were opened to see a spiritual truth which was far in advance of any contemporary revelation,

[1] L. Bertrand, *Saint Augustin*, 31.

and was destined to become the mould into which some of the richest ore of gospel truth should be poured. It was not the last time when mortal eyes were closed in order to see; shielded from the glare of this world that they might behold the light that never was on sea or land. The *blind* Milton sang of Paradise lost and regained.[1]

2. For the first time in prophecy, the heart comes into prominence. It is the heart that is good or ill. "Cast your idols of gold and your idols of silver to the moles and to the bats," cried Isaiah. "Cast your ark of the covenant, your temple made with hands, your holy sacrifices, your sacred utensils and machinery—cast them all into the same dust-hole," cried Jeremiah. "In those days, saith the Lord, they shall say no more, The ark of the covenant of the Lord; neither shall it come to mind: neither shall they remember it." "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." "I will make a new covenant with them, saith the Lord, I will write my law upon their hearts." Jeremiah is the prophet, not of reform, but of revolution; the preacher of a new *régime*—but the new *régime* is the New Covenant.

¶ Luther once visited a dying student; for to him it was common to have resort in cases of difficulty or extremity. The good doctor and professor asked the young man what he should take to God, in whose presence he was shortly to appear. The young man replied, "Everything that is good, dear father—everything that is good!" Luther, rather surprised, said, "But how can you bring Him everything that is good, seeing you are but a poor sinner?" The pious youth replied, "Dear father, I will take to my God in heaven a penitent, humble heart, sprinkled with the blood of Christ." "Truly," said Luther, "this is everything good. Then go, dear son; you will be a welcome guest to God."

3. It is clear that if God gave to each a heart to know Him, no need would any longer exist for one to exhort another to acquaint himself with God. All would know Him from the least to the greatest. The relation of God to the individual would be immediate and direct, independent of the State or official order of religious teachers. It would nevertheless be a mistake to interpret Jeremiah as the prophet of an atomistic individualism. An individualist he was, and that in full measure. But the New

[1] F. B. Meyer.

Covenant itself is made with the nation. The religion remains the religion of Israel, a national religion. God and Israel are still the contracting parties to the New Covenant as to the Old. But the individualism which characterized the New made the religion national in a sense unattainable under the Old. For when the religion rested on external guarantees and was expressed in external institutions, while its laws were imposed by an external authority, when moreover the nation was contemplated as a unit, without reference to the individuals of whom it was composed, then it was national, but in a general and superficial sense. Only when every individual in the mass is renewed in heart, and his will is brought into harmony with the Divine will, can the nation itself be truly called religious. Through its individualism the religion first became national in the full sense of the term.

Here then Jeremiah anticipates Christianity more clearly than any other Old Testament prophet. Jesus Himself accepts his idea of the New Covenant, and embodies it in His solemn utterance at the Last Supper—"*This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood*"—together with the saying about the bread, the best authenticated of all our Lord's utterances, since it is recorded by St. Paul as well as the three Synoptic writers. But more important by far than the mere adoption of the symbol is the realization of the essential idea of Jeremiah's New Covenant by Jesus Christ. What is more characteristic of Christianity in contrast with Judaism than the inwardness of the one compared with the externalism of the other? The Jews washed the outside of the cup and platter; Jesus the inside. They bathed their bodies as a ceremonial ablution; Jesus cleansed the heart. So while they had rules of casuistry, Jesus infused inner principles of life — love to God and love to man. Thus they who follow Christ have God's law of love written on their hearts, and learn to live from within outward. Such a life is necessarily individualistic, centred in "the abysmal depth of personality." Jeremiah writes, "And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more." This is realized in Christianity. While Judaism is a national

faith, Christianity is a personal religion. And, finally, while the Jews could not find ease of conscience in their religion, Christ could say: "The Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins."

¶ Samuel Wesley's sudden death in November 1739 was the heaviest blow which could have fallen upon his widowed mother. He had always been her favourite son—he shared her most intimate thoughts—and even in a pecuniary sense the loss of his support would be very great. She was ill at the time, having been confined to her room for ten weeks. Yet once again her children were surprised by the way in which she was "strengthened to bear" this new calamity: "I did immediately acquiesce in the will of God, without the least reluctance." Perhaps the comfort which had come to her a few weeks before in her spiritual life accounted in some measure for the calm which she now showed. This experience marked the hour when she was completely won over to her son John's doctrine, and is best told in his own words: "I talked largely with my mother, who told me that till a short time since, she had scarce heard such a thing mentioned as the having forgiveness of sins now, or God's Spirit bearing witness with our spirit: much less did she imagine that this was the common privilege of all true believers. 'Therefore,' said she, 'I never durst ask it for myself. But two or three weeks ago, while my son Hall (Patty's husband) was pronouncing those words in delivering the cup to me, "The blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for thee," the words struck through my heart, and I knew God for Christ's sake had forgiven me all my sins.'"[1]

IV.

The Vision of the Future.

A part, yet only a part, of a prophet's duty, as one sent from God and declaring the Divine will, lay in the direction of prediction. His principal function was not to foretell the future condition of the world, but to alter for the better its existing condition. As has often been pointed out, the word prophet does not itself express the idea of announcing future events. It means, not a foreteller but a forth-teller, one who sets out God's messages, whether as teaching the lessons of the past, or as emphasizing the duties of the present, or as heralding the Divine purposes in the

[1] M. R. Brailsford, *Susanna Wesley*, 119.

future. A prophet's declarations in this last respect are modified by the circumstances under which he delivers them and by the conditions of his age. The fulfilment may be in a completeness of form and detail which the prophet was wholly unable to picture to himself. Jeremiah's Messianic hopes have thus attained in the Advent of the Saviour and the founding of the Christian Church a consummation much more glorious than it was granted to him to perceive. We may, however, see under the figures and in the accustomed language of the prophetic age his inspired realization of a coming time when the chasm which separated God from man should somehow be bridged over, when forgiveness of sins and spiritual religion should take up a prominence which they had never before held.

1. Jeremiah was no prophet of despair. To the very last he believed that the dark troubles he so clearly foresaw would be followed by a new era of what was better than a return of prosperity—genuine reformation and real progress. The storm would be terrible while it lasted; but it would clear the air, and, after it had passed, the subsequent serenity would outshine all the glory that the world had ever seen before. He showed his faith in the future by a significant deed that proved it to be real. In the picturesque manner of the Eastern teacher, he was accustomed to illustrate his lessons by symbolical actions. Thus, on one occasion, he buried his girdle in the mud of the Euphrates, and then brought it out and showed it to the people as an image of their defilement; and another time he went down to the valley of Hinnom and there broke a potter's vessel as a sign of the break-up of the kingdom that he predicted. But now what he did was more than a merely dramatic illustration. It was a piece of plain, matter-of-fact business, which men of the world would be bound to appraise at its true worth.

2. Three features of his vision of the future may be mentioned.

(1) He held firmly to the faith that the people of God could never perish. "Thus saith the Lord, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which stirreth up the sea that the waves thereof roar; the Lord of Hosts is his name: If those ordinances depart

from before me, saith the Lord, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever."

(2) Not only would the nation persist, but the soil of the Holy Land, from which it had been expelled, would be restored to it. Of his faith in this restitution Jeremiah gave a signal proof by purchasing a field in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, in the height of the Babylonian siege. The Roman historian, Livy, gives an account of a transaction almost identical at the moment when Hannibal was at the gates of Rome: the very spot on which the Carthaginian general was encamped was purchased at its full value by a Roman citizen who did not despair of the Republic.

(3) Of course the restoration of the Holy Land implied that the people would be brought back from their captivity. This was a most unlikely occurrence; but Jeremiah again and again in the clearest terms predicted it: "The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, Write thee all the words that I have spoken unto thee in a book. For, lo, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will turn again the captivity of my people Israel and Judah, saith the Lord: and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it." The deliverance from Babylon would outrival even the famous exodus from Egypt: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that it shall no more be said, The Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; but, The Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the lands whither he had driven them: and I will bring them again into their land that I gave unto their fathers." To Jeremiah it was even given to specify the length of time that the Captivity was to last; and the fulfilment of this prediction is one of the most remarkable instances of fulfilled prophecy that the Scriptures contain: "After seventy years be accomplished for Babylon, I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place." At the time Babylon was the greatest military power on earth and seemed impregnable; but Jeremiah foretold that it would fall before the invader; and that in the catastrophe Israel would escape. And thus it all came to pass.

3. Not only does Jeremiah promise what actually came to pass—the return of the exiles to the territories of Benjamin and

Judah, and the resumption there of the interrupted social state, in which again, as of old, the sounds of joy and life would be heard in the villages, shepherds would again tend their flocks, and houses and fields would again be bought and sold by the restored exiles—but he invests the future with ideal colours. The exiles of the Northern Kingdom will share in the restoration; the hills of Ephraim will again resound with happy throngs, and be clad with cornfields and vineyards; a great company will return from the farthest corners of the earth; the wants of all will be abundantly satisfied. The national life will be re-established; Jerusalem will be rebuilt, and will be entirely holy to Jehovah. The restored city is to bear the same symbolical name as the ideal King, "The Lord is our righteousness." The restored nation is pictured as returning to Jehovah "with its whole heart"; words of confession and penitence are put into the mouth of both Judah and Ephraim; the iniquity of Israel will be forgiven, and remembered no more; one heart, and one way, even the way of Jehovah's fear, will be given to them; Israel will be Jehovah's people, and He will be their God.

It must be evident that many of these promises have not been fulfilled, and that circumstances have now so changed that they never can be fulfilled; but, like the similar pictures drawn by other prophets, they remain as inspiring ideals of the future which God would fain see realized by or for His people, and of the goal which man, with God's help, should ever strive to attain.

¶ Like many of the world's greatest children, Jeremiah was little esteemed in his life, but when dead his spirit breathed out upon men, and they felt its beauty and greatness. The oppressed people saw for ages in his sufferings a type of itself, and drew from his constancy courage to endure and be true. Imagery from the scenes of his life and echoes of his words fill many of the Psalms, the authors of which were like him in his sorrows, and strove to be like him in his faith. From being of no account as a prophet, he came to be considered the greatest of them all, and was spoken of as "the prophet"; and it was told of him how in after days he appeared in visions to those contending for the faith like an angel from heaven strengthening them.[1]

[1] G. Steven, *The Kings and the Prophets*, 118.

EZEKIEL.

I.

The Place of Ezekiel.

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The Place of Ezekiel.

Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the river Chebar, that the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God.—Ezek. i. 1.

The Book of Ezekiel is generally considered to be one of the most difficult in the Bible; it is certainly one of the most interesting. At the centre of the development of Israelite history and religion stand the prophets; at the centre of the goodly fellowship of the prophets stands Ezekiel. The religious thought and activity of Israel is full of contrasts; the contrast between prophet and priest, the messages which they brought to the nation and the principles for which they stood; the contrast between their ideals for the nation and their ideals for the individual, and the consequent difference in their thoughts of God, the soul, and the world; the contrast between the speaker and the writer, and between the preacher who directs himself to the needs of the present and the seer who projects his gaze to the day of the final consummation of God's righteousness; the contrast between the philosophic interpretation of national history and the inspired outbursts of religious emotion;—all these contrasts meet in Ezekiel, at once priest and prophet, inspirer of a nation and pastor of individual souls, the preacher to expectant audiences and the writer for future generations.

¶ It may be said, I think, without rashness that for every ten readers of Isaiah, readers who think and love, there are seven readers of Jeremiah, and not more than two or three who turn to Ezekiel with a like spirit of reverential study. In the old lectionary of the English Church, the latter prophet was almost conspicuous by his absence, and there were but fifteen lessons taken from his writings. It is one of the many gains from the new table of lessons that the balance is, in some measure, redressed, and that men are taught not to look on one of the great prophets of the Old Testament as too hard for them to understand

or profit by. But it may be questioned how far that lesson has as yet been adequately learned.[1]

¶ Ezekiel is at once one of the most mysterious, yet one of the most entrancing, of the Hebrew seers.[2]

I.

Ezekiel's Times.

1. It will give us a clearer conception of the man whose mission we are to study if we bear in mind the stirring events amidst which his youth was spent. At the time of his birth the great reformation set in motion by King Josiah after the discovery of the roll of the law was still in full swing. As a boy, Ezekiel may have seen the royal servants overthrowing the altars of Baal and cutting down the idolatrous Asherah; or he may have stood to watch the workmen of Jerusalem repairing the Temple of Jehovah. But the events which must have impressed him most were transpiring on the wider plain of international history. Away to the north-east, on the banks of the Tigris, stood the mighty fortress-town of Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, for nearly two centuries the dominant power of Western Asia. Two powerful races, however, were threatening her ascendancy, and she was tottering to the fall. The Medes pressed her from the north and the Chaldæans from the south. For two years they waited and made ready to strike when the opportune moment arrived. Meantime Assyria's ancient rival, Egypt, was also preparing for a great campaign, and in 608 B.C. Pharaoh-Necho set his armies in motion to attack Nineveh.

Josiah, the Jewish king, seems to have determined to prevent Necho from passing through his country. Possibly he hoped to gain a victory which would not only check Egypt but also bring back Northern Israel to the house of David and to the worship of Jehovah. He therefore flung himself right across Necho's path at the narrow pass of Megiddo; a disastrous defeat followed, and the Jewish charioteers returned with the dead body of their king to bury him in Jerusalem.

The disastrous end of so good a king was a sore trial to the

[1] Dean E. H. Plumptre [2] Jean Paul Richter.

faith of the pious Israelites. But worse trials were to follow. Pharaoh placed Jehoiakim, the eldest son of Josiah, as his vassal on the throne of Judah, but in 605 B.C. he was himself defeated at Carchemish by Nebuchadnezzar. The conqueror allowed Jehoiakim to retain his throne, but in spite of this Jehoiakim rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar three years later, and was slain in the eleventh year of a bad reign. His son and successor, Jehoiachin, reigned but three months and ten days, at the close of which Nebuchadnezzar carried him away captive to Babylon with his family, his treasure, and ten thousand prisoners, among whom were the flower of the aristocracy and of the male population of Jerusalem. This took place in the year 597 B.C.

In the train of exiles which sadly wended its way across the desert to Babylon was a young priest, Ezekiel the son of Buzi, designed by God to be the centre of religious life and hope for his countrymen in the land of their banishment.

2. From this time forward the prophet's home was in the land of the Chaldæans, at a city called Tel-Abib, or "hill of corn-ears," perhaps so named in consequence of the fertility of the surrounding district—a city whose site has not yet been discovered, though Ezekiel himself locates it on the river Chebar. The Chebar is not to be identified with the Chabor which falls into the Euphrates near Carchemish, but is some stream or canal in Babylonia proper. Five years later he was called to occupy among the exiles the place of a "watchman" (592 B.C.). How large the community was does not appear, nor what kind of place Tel-Abib was, for the references of the prophet to walls hardly justify the conclusion that it was a walled town. The community appears to have been left, as was usually the case, to regulate its internal affairs and govern itself according to its own mind. The prophet repeatedly mentions the "elders," and though he calls them elders of Judah or Israel, he identifies them with the Captivity, of which they must have been the heads and representatives.

The exiles succeeded in preserving most of their national peculiarities under the very eyes of their conquerors. Of their temporal condition very little is known beyond the fact that they found themselves in tolerably easy circumstances, with the opportunity to acquire property and amass wealth. The advice which

Jeremiah sent them from Jerusalem, that they should identify themselves with the interests of Babylon, and live settled and orderly lives in peaceful industry and domestic happiness shows that they were not treated as prisoners or as slaves. The prophet had his own house, where the people were free to visit him, and social life in all probability differed little from that in a small provincial town in Palestine. That, to be sure, was a great change for the quondam aristocrats of Jerusalem, but it was not a change to which they could not readily adapt themselves.

3. Of much greater importance, however, is the state of mind which prevailed among these exiles. And here the remarkable thing is their intense preoccupation with matters national and Israelitic. A lively intercourse with the mother country was kept up, and the exiles were perfectly informed of all that was going on in Jerusalem. There were, no doubt, personal and selfish reasons for their keen interest in the doings of their countrymen at home. The antipathy which existed between the two branches of the Jewish people was extreme. The exiles had left their children behind them to suffer under the reproach of their fathers' misfortunes. They appear also to have been compelled to sell their estates hurriedly on the eve of their departure, and such transactions, necessarily turning to the advantage of the purchasers, left a deep grudge in the breasts of the sellers. Those who remained in the land exulted in the calamity which had brought so much profit to themselves, and thought themselves perfectly secure in so doing, because they regarded their brethren as men driven out for their sins from Jehovah's heritage. The exiles on their part affected the utmost contempt for the pretensions of the upstart plebeians who were carrying things with a high hand in Jerusalem. Like the French *émigrés* in the time of the Revolution, they no doubt felt that their country was being ruined for want of proper guidance and experienced statesmanship. Nor was it altogether patrician prejudice that gave them this feeling of their own superiority. Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel regarded the exiles as the better part of the nation, and the nucleus of the Messianic community of the future. For the moment, indeed, there does not seem to have been much to choose, in point of religious belief and practice, between the two sections of the

people. In both places the majority were steeped in idolatrous and superstitious notions; some appear even to have entertained the purpose of assimilating themselves to the heathen around, and only a small minority were steadfast in their allegiance to the national religion. Yet the exiles could not, any more than the remnant in Judah, abandon the hope that Jehovah would save His sanctuary from desecration. The Temple was the excellency of their strength, the delight of their eyes, and that which their soul desired. False prophets appeared in Babylon to prophesy smooth things, and assure the exiles of a speedy restoration to their place in the people of God. It was not till Jerusalem was laid in ruins, and the Jewish State had disappeared from the earth, that the Israelites were in a mood to understand the meaning of God's judgment, or to learn the lessons which the prophecy of nearly two centuries had vainly striven to inculcate.

The effect of the actual fall of the city, however, differed in different cases. The faith of some was finally shattered. Jehovah, they thought, had proved His impotence. The nation was irretrievably cut off; its hope was lost. Others sank into a condition of listless despondency, crushed by the sense of the national sins which had incurred such overwhelming retribution. We pine away in our transgressions, was their cry; how then should we live? To others again the Exile was a purifying discipline. It vindicated and enforced the spiritual lessons of prophecy; it invited men anew to that conversion of heart, that diligence in seeking Jehovah which the prophets had preached with such small practical effect. These faithful Israelites were probably few in number, but the hopes of a brighter future for the nation were centred in them. Though many, perhaps the great mass, of their compatriots were hardened by misfortune, and virtually abandoned their ancestral religion, as we may gather from the stern descriptions of Ezekiel, yet there was a remnant which could read aright the solemn lessons of calamity which still clung to the hopes held out by prophecy, and earnestly believed that "Israel's death was but a passing over into a new life." The exiles had much to suffer, but they were sustained by the thought of the unchanging purpose of mercy which had so often brought blessing out of misfortune. In a spirit of

humble and hopeful penitence they waited for the consolation of Israel.

¶ A young nun asked her one day what she should do in order to become a saint. "Daughter," Teresa answered, "I am shortly going to start on a journey to make a new Foundation; I will take you with me, and teach you what is required." They started; many months passed in sufferings, fatigues, in great isolation, and many anxieties. At first the poor nun suffered in silence. Then, finding the trial somewhat prolonged, she gently complained to the Mother. Teresa's answer was, "Did you not ask me to teach you how to become a saint, daughter? It is thus one becomes a saint. Sufferings endured for the love of God are the true road to sanctity." [1]

¶ "Invalids have a great influence over healthy people," she wrote on the 5th of July 1909 to Mrs. H. R.; "the latter sympathize with them, and eagerly watch to see what faith can do in trial. If faith is triumphant then no sermon, no address, will come anywhere near it for convincing power and value. In these days of scepticism we need living witnesses to the power of Christ, and this particular kind of witness impresses every one. For some months past I have felt a greater responsibility than ever about the power of faith in suffering. I pray very often that God will uphold me and direct all my words, for scores of visitors are watching me, ready to falter if I seem to weaken, or to believe with all their heart if I am full of peace and of confidence in God's love.

"Every life has an influence for good or evil. I have gone through a great deal of painful inward experience ever since I was quite little. I am sure that God has ordered my life for a very definite purpose, as my present condition shows; and He has done it with such tenderness and exquisite gentleness, bringing each trial gradually to me, that now I lie here in my helplessness a willing instrument in the hands of God. I take up the task He sets me, even though I would have preferred to remain unnoticed. I will be brave, and shoulder even that responsibility which seems almost too much for my spiritual and physical powers. And since it is my life-work to witness to the power of faith in suffering, I accept it very gratefully, and I thank God for it every day, asking Him to sustain me in this most beautiful path of service—that of glorifying Him by suffering, and so, by this means, of leading many souls to trust Him too." [2]

[1] Lady Lovat and R. H. Benson, *The Life of St. Teresa* (1914), 584.
[2] *A Living Witness: The Life of Adèle Kamm* (1914), 173.

Long time across my path had lain
A far-off bar like gathering rain;
The sunshine beamed along my way,
But this drew nearer day by day.

I walked amid a laughing throng,
I plucked the flowers, I sang my song;
But all the time my load of care,
My bar of threatening cloud, was there.

Some day, I knew, that bar must break
In tempest, fatal for my sake;
And in my heart of hearts I laid
My secret, and was sore afraid.

And yet it caught me by surprise;
Loud thunders pealed across the skies;
Ere I had time for craven fear
The hour had struck. The end was near.

With lips and lids set hard together
I sank upon the springy heather;
I said farewell to pleasant things,
And waited for the angel's wings.

When, oh! the marvel! through the rain
Came odours exquisite as pain;
A softer warmth, like lovers' breath,
Danced on my cheek instead of Death.

The birds around me sang in choirs;
My eyes unclosed to clearer fires;
The storm was only sent to purge
Of cloud my sky from verge to verge![1]

II.

Ezekiel's Inheritance.

The period in which the prophet's youth was passed was rich in influence that must have powerfully affected him. Though too young to take part in the reform of Josiah he would remember

[1] Edmund Gosse, *In Russet and Silver*.

it, and he grew up in the midst of the changes which it had introduced, and probably learned to estimate previous history from the point of view which it gave him. The tragic events which followed one another closely at this epoch, such as the death of Josiah, the exile of Jehoahaz to Egypt and of Jehoiachin to Babylon, made an enduring impression on his mind. The last event formed the chief landmark of his life, and that not solely because his own history was so closely connected with it. How deeply the fate of the two young princes touched him, and how well he could sympathize with the country's sorrow over it, a sorrow recorded also by Jeremiah, is seen in his elegy on the princes of Israel. He has a fondness for historical study, and no history is to him without a moral; and silently the events of this time were writing principles upon his mind to which in after years he was to give forcible enough expression.

1. We ask ourselves, as we trace the mental history of poets, thinkers, statesmen, what was their environment, who were they who, somewhat older it may be than themselves, were working round them, influencing them, directly or indirectly, by action or reaction. Among Ezekiel's contemporaries one name stands out with an illustrious pre-eminence. Jeremiah, the priest of Anathoth, ministering in the Temple, prophesying in the streets of Jerusalem, must have been known to the son of Buzi who was in training for the priesthood; and there, or at Anathoth, he may have listened eagerly to his teaching. Looking to the chronology of Jeremiah's life, we find that at an earlier age than was common, probably therefore between twenty and twenty-five, he was called to his work as a prophet in the thirteenth year of Josiah, four years before the discovery of the "book of the law of the Lord," and five years before the date which has been fixed for the birth of Ezekiel. During the whole of the younger prophet's earlier years, therefore, he must have lived as under the shadow of the elder. At the death of Josiah in 608 B.C., Jeremiah was from thirty-eight to forty-three years of age, while Ezekiel was only fifteen. The time of companionship which remained after that date was comparatively short. During a period of eleven years and a half Ezekiel must have been under Jeremiah's immediate influence, but as he was only twenty-five or twenty-six at its close, and had

received no direct call to the office of a prophet, we cannot wonder that he abstained as yet from being more than a silent witness of his work. After the deportation his direct knowledge of Jeremiah's teaching ceased, and all that reached him must have been through such messengers as came from time to time from Jerusalem to the land of his exile, or through the epistle which the older prophet sent "to the priests and to the prophets and to all the people" whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried into captivity in Babylon.

2. A careful study of Ezekiel's prophecies will show how largely he had profited by the teaching of the prophet at whose feet he had thus sat. That symbolic eating of the roll of a book which was sweet as honey in his mouth (Ezek. iii. 2) was the acted rendering of Jeremiah's words, "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart." The great lesson of the personal responsibility of each man for his own sin—as distinct from the distorted view of a transmitted and inherited guilt which embodied itself in the popular proverb: "the fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge"—which was expanded by the one prophet (Ezek. xviii. 2–29), was the distinct echo of the self-same teaching proclaimed more concisely by the other.

It would, no doubt, be a mistake to ascribe every idea in Ezekiel which coincides with Jeremiah's teaching to the influence of that prophet. There is a common circle of thoughts and feelings which even the greatest minds share with those of their own age. Striking out some new conceptions, and opening up some lines of advancement which mark an epoch, the chief elements of their faith and life are common to them with others of their day and have been inherited from the past. The surprise with which we read Jeremiah might be lessened if the means of comparing him with others were not so narrow as the paucity of writers in the century before the Exile causes it to be. At any rate his influence upon the language and thought of Ezekiel can readily be observed. It could hardly have been otherwise. For thirty years before Ezekiel's captivity Jeremiah had been a prophet, speaking in the courts and chambers of the Temple and in the streets of Jerusalem, and having such a history as made

him the most prominent figure of the day. Ezekiel was familiar with his history and had listened to his words from his infancy. Many of his prophecies had circulated in writing for a number of years previous to the captivity of Jehoiachin which Ezekiel shared, and the constant intercourse between Jerusalem and the exiles kept the prophet of the Chebar well informed regarding the course of events at home, and the views which prominent persons there took of them.

3. Jeremiah had earned the hatred of his fellow-countrymen by his bold proclamation of destruction against the city and of doom to the nation. The stern logic of facts had proved that he was right and the rulers wrong. Yet he had to bear the brunt of obloquy which any public teacher must sustain who is charged with anti-patriotism. And therefore no reconstruction of State policy or ecclesiastical organization was easily feasible for him. What he had accomplished for his fellow-countrymen was the task of dispelling the illusions of the past and setting up in their place loftier and more permanent ideals. To this inheritance Ezekiel succeeded. He continued what Jeremiah had begun, but in a different spirit, and under altered and more favourable conditions. The external bases of Israel's religion had been swept away, and in exchange for these Jeremiah led the people to the more permanent internal grounds of a spiritual renewal. But could a religion permanently subsist in this world of space and time without some external concrete embodiment? Can a people and a people's religion be utterly cut off from the past? This was the problem that now engaged Ezekiel's attention. The externalities of the past seemed to be buried in ashes and ruins. It was for Ezekiel to take up once more the broken threads of Israel's religious traditions and weave the strands anew into statelier and more attractive forms of ritual and national policy, adapted to the new conditions of thought and life. The attempt was ideal and tentative, but it was a worthy attempt, and, as history has shown, when truly read, it had abiding and far-reaching consequences.

¶ The past is not, in any effective sense, irrevocable. We may yet make it, in large measure, what we will. For detached experiences are in themselves mere unintelligible fragments. It

is when they are taken as parts of a whole that they have their meaning. And what is the whole of which our past is a part? Is that irrevocably fixed beyond our control? Nay, our past as well as our future shall be what we shall make it. It is a fragment that awaits interpretation, nay, awaits its full being, its true creation, from the whole.[1]

¶ Each generation or age of men is under a twofold temptation, the one to overrate its own performances and prospects, the other to undervalue the times preceding or following its own. No greater calamity can happen to a people than to break utterly with its Past. But the proposition in its full breadth applies more to its aggregate than to its immediate Past. Our judgment on the age that last preceded us should be strictly just. But it should be masculine, not timorous; for, if we gild its defects, and glorify its errors, we dislocate the axis of the very ground which forms our own point of departure.[2]

¶ In some of those to whom Christ said, "Go and sin no more," there can have been but a very halting faith, so far as intellectual understanding went. In all of them there was the forsaking of the broken and wasted past, to face the future with that which remained. The power to do this certainly lay in Him who inspired them with new courage and offered them the new chance. But when we see a man obviously inspired for duty, undismayed by failure, facing the future as Stevenson ever faced it for himself and urged his fellows to face it, may we not discern behind the gallant figure of the human combatant the form of the Son of Man? At least we may be sure of this, that there are very many persons whose moral condition needs exactly this message. With faith confused and dim, with the irrevocable past filling all their souls with discouragement, it cannot but be well for them to hear the voice that calls to them to hold fast that which remains. If they will take heart and obey, sooner or later the Master will reveal Himself to them; for it was Himself who said that many acts done strenuously and lovingly by those who knew not that they were serving Him would prove at the last to have been done unto Him.[3]

[1] P. H. Wicksteed, in *Studies in Theology*, 24.
[2] W. E. Gladstone, in *The Nineteenth Century*, xxi. 4.
[3] J. Kelman, *The Faith of Robert Louis Stevenson*, 239.

III.

Ezekiel's Work.

Ezekiel was more than a prophet. An important part of his work was the task of rebuking, instructing and consoling the people among whom he dwelt. He laboured to cultivate among his countrymen the temper of humility, of personal repentance, of confidence in Jehovah's mercy. His mission was to justify God's dealings with Israel, and to keep alive in individual souls the faith which was ready to perish under the pressure of adversity. As in other troubled periods of human history, so during the Exile, the distresses of the nation ministered to the growth of individual faith. When national hopes were extinguished, men found comfort in the practice of personal religion, and sought the Kingdom of God in their own hearts and lives.

There are thus three aspects in which Ezekiel's work is to be regarded. He was Prophet, Priest, and Pastor. Let us consider these offices separately and in that order.

1. *The Prophet.* — The actual circumstances of Ezekiel's prophetic career are greatly obscured for us by the difficulty we have in separating what is real from what is merely imagined in the representation given by the book. That everything did not happen literally as it is recorded is evident enough from several indications. The symbolic actions described as performed by the prophet are in some instances incapable of a literal acceptation; yet there is no external criterion by which these can be distinguished from others which are possible. A similar uncertainty hangs over the events that are mentioned. These are never introduced for their own sake, but only as the setting of some idea which the writer wishes to enforce, and it is frequently impossible to determine how far the allusions correspond with actual experiences. In such incidents as the death of the prophet's wife or the opening of his mouth in the presence of "the fugitive," fact and symbolism seem to be so intimately blended that we cannot tell where the one ends and the other begins. The book, in short, is not an autobiography, but a systematic exposition of prophetic ideas, and any attempt to

extract historical information from it has to be made with a certain measure of caution. At the same time, it is quite incredible that the whole representation should be nothing but an elaborate fiction, without any basis in fact. There can be no reasonable doubt that Ezekiel really exercised an oral public ministry among his fellow-captives, or that its main outlines may be gathered from the thin thread of narrative that runs through the book.

Now Ezekiel occupied an entirely new position as the prophet of Jehovah in a foreign country, far removed from the old centre of national life and worship, and from all that had been regarded as constituting the distinctive privileges of Israel among the nations of the world. This new position largely moulded the character of his ministry. In the land of exile, at a distance from the scene of action, remote from the feverish turmoil, the restless hopes and fears which agitated Jerusalem during the last ten years of its existence, he could more dispassionately survey the great catastrophe that was impending, and more calmly reflect upon its meaning and its purpose. Hitherto, public discourse had been the principal method of prophetic ministry. Jeremiah preached for years before he committed any of his prophecies to writing; but now, under the changed circumstances of his position, the prophet must turn author. It is significant that "a roll of a book" is given him as the symbol of his commission. Ezekiel's prophecies bear evidence of long meditation and careful elaboration. Originally he may have spoken the substance of them to his little band of hearers, for he tells us that at one time it was the fashion to come and listen, and that they complained that he was "a speaker of parables"; but they were intended for Judæa as well as Babylonia, and he bestowed careful attention on their literary form as he committed them to writing. He dwells upon his subject, and expands and develops his thoughts, in contrast to the terse, sharp utterances of the older prophets. Not content with an outline, he fills in the details of the picture, sometimes to the detriment of its distinctness.

¶ And it is here, surely, that we finally come upon the central ground and basis of all true religious prophecy. The seer, what is he? Is he not just the man who sees deeper than others, more clearly than others; sees right into the heart of things, into the essential equality of being; one who, from an accurate knowledge

of the great spiritual forces at work in the world, can predict how they will act, and what results will come from this action? This it is which has made the prophets—the true ones—the great moral authorities of the world. Whether teaching in Judæa, in Greece, in Germany, in England, the men of the spirit have had practically one message. Uttered in all languages, in a hundred different forms, it has meant always and everywhere the same thing. They have stood, all of them, for a Kingdom of God, for a rule of righteousness, for the supremacy of the spirit over the flesh, for the rule of love, for the redemption of our lower nature by a higher nature, for the final triumph of goodness.[1]

¶ It is the prophet who has roused the race from ignoble sleep, has fired its imagination with lofty ideals, has nerved it for costly sacrifices, has led it to victory. It is the prophet, above all, who, under Christ, has laid the foundations of the Church in every land, has restored her after periods of decay, has filled her with courage and hope. He is the teacher, comforter, fosterer, defender of his brethren, and therefore the chief office to which any man can be called is to declare the Will of God, and especially the Evangel of Christ.[2]

And thus, O Prophet-bard of old,
Hast thou thy tale of sorrow told!
The same which earth's unwelcome seers
Have felt in all succeeding years.
Sport of the changeful multitude,
Nor calmly heard nor understood,
Their song has seemed a trick of art,
Their warnings but the actor's part.
With bonds, and scorn, and evil will,
The world requites its prophets still.

Yet shrink not thou, whoe'er thou art,
For God's great purpose set apart,
Before whose far-discerning eyes,
The Future as the Present lies!
Beyond a narrow-bounded age
Stretches thy prophet-heritage,
Through Heaven's dim spaces angel trod,
Through arches round the throne of God!
Thy audience, worlds!—all Time to be
The witness of the Truth in thee![3]

[1] J. Brierley, *Faith's Certainties* (1914), 85.
[2] John Watson, *The Cure of Souls*, 2.
[3] J. G. Whittier.

2. *The Priest.*—But Ezekiel differs from the other prophets in this, that he stands before us as half-prophet and half-priest. He has been described by a great authority as "a priest in a prophet's mantle." In him the two streams met and parted. Prophetism ended in Ezekiel the prophet, and the hierarchy began in Ezekiel the priest. His prophetic inspiration helped to set the relics of Israel on their feet; but his priestly sympathies began that organization of the inspiration which made the nation a Church, and tied it at a short tether where it stood. The Judaism which he started on its career tended to kill the faith in which he began it.

To Ezekiel the prophetic view, that the history of the past had been one long moral disobedience, was joined to the priest's view that it had been one great ritual mistake. Holy things and places had been put to wrong uses; there had been a terrible confusion of the sacred and the profane, until at last Jehovah was forced out of His own Temple; and His Presence had been displaced by that of corpses interred there, of uncircumcised Temple servants, and of unholy and monstrous superstitious rites. Sacrifices offered by impure hands could avail nothing. Hence the imperative need of new legislation. The Temple must be preserved from all impurity; the degrees of holiness must be preserved; the sacrifices must be defined and fenced round so that they may become effective for real atonement; and the priests must keep themselves pure for their high office. When the Temple is thus made the centre of the nation's holiness the whole nation will be grouped, so to speak, around it; there must be as little inter-tribal rivalry as there will be monarchical oppression; each tribe, like the priests, the inhabitants of the holy city, and the prince, will have its own estates to cultivate, and there will be nothing to disturb Jehovah's gracious Presence in the midst of His people.

In this aspect of Ezekiel's work it has been customary to see a decline from the heights of earlier prophetic teaching. And in the abstract this is no doubt true. Ritual, in and of itself, is no necessary part of genuine religion. On the contrary, it frequently carries with it much that is materialistic and unspiritual. But over against this it should be borne in mind that there are many non-essential things in religion that are acceptable in order to make religion effective in the world. These non-essentials vary from age to age. But they exist in every age. And it is an evidence of

true religious statesmanship to be able to single them out and make them the efficient means of religious culture. This power and insight Ezekiel possessed; and it was because he possessed it, and because his work was carried on by other men, such as Ezra and Nehemiah, that Old Testament religion was made strong enough to resist the encroachments of Greek naturalism.

¶ Whatever may be the opinion of us regarding some aspects and effects of ritualism—more especially of debased forms of it—it is well to remember what an integral part it has been, and is, of the history of the Church of Christ. That being so, we should be grateful to the Lord of the Church when ritual movements and developments are guided by good and holy men. A Father Damien in the lepers' colony, a Father Dolling in the heart of London's wretchedness—both are clearly in Ezekiel's succession, priests of his Temple and dwellers on the bank of his River. Another vaster Temple is ours, "not made with hands"; and from this Temple another vaster river flows.

> We faintly hear, we dimly see,
> In differing phrase we pray;
> But dim or clear, we own in Thee
> The Light, the Truth, the Way.

What God blesses, what Christ owns, must have its place and use. Ezekiel's order has not lived on from age to age in vain.[1]

3. *The Pastor.*—Ezekiel was prophet and priest, and he was more. He was pastor of souls. To say that he was no prophet at all, but merely a pastor exercising the cure of souls among those who came under his personal influence, is an exaggeration of a truth. His insistence on the independence of the individual soul before God, and his comparison of himself to a watchman responsible for each person who perishes through not being warned of his danger, suggest that the care of the individual must have occupied a larger place in his work than was the case with the pre-Exilic prophets. At a time when the unity of the nation was broken up, and the new Kingdom of God had to be born in the hearts of those who embraced the hope set before them by the prophets, it was inevitable that a religious teacher should devote much of his attention to the conversion and spiritual direction of individuals.

[1] H. E. Lewis, *By the River Chebar*, 176.

He had a lofty ideal of the pastoral office, and knew that God would require the blood of souls at his hand if he failed to warn them. And, in spite of his Pelagian view, as some might be inclined to call it, on free-will, Ezekiel regards the work of conversion as essentially Divine. "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean. . . . A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh." Of all the misgivings that troubled him, the watchman's terror moved him most profoundly. "When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die, and thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way; that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at thine hand." The Divine warning had come to him at the very beginning of his ministry, after he had remained among the captives "astonished" seven days. The simple feeling of bitterness and indignation which filled his mind when he newly left the presence of God became broken into a tumult of feelings when he saw the face of men. Zeal for God becomes tempered and humanized in actual service.

¶ "Remember what is written of this pastoral office by the prophet Ezekiel," said Edward Irving, in a solemn Ordination Charge in 1827.

¶ A certain doctor of the Order of Preachers, troubled with the warning given to Ezekiel—"His soul will I require at thine hand"—came to Francis of Assisi and said:

"Many, good father, do I know that be in mortal sin, unto whom I speak not to warn them from their wicked way. Will their souls be required at my hand?"

Francis, humble as usual, was unwilling to take upon him to decide such a "case of conscience," but, being pressed, said: "If it be that the word is to be understood generally, I take it in such wise as that the servant of God ought so to burn and shine in his life and holiness in himself as by the ensample of his life and by the tongue of his holy conversation he may be a rebuke unto all the wicked. Thus, I say, the brightness of his light and the sweet smell of his good name will be a warning to all to forsake their wicked way."[1]

¶ Watson's pastoral work was, in some respects, even more remarkable than his preaching. As his friend Dr. Oswald Dykes has said, the pulpit offers attractions for artistic natures like his

[1] H. E. Lewis, *By the River Chebar*, 33.

sufficient to outweigh any fastidious shrinking from those vulgar accessories which attend a popular preacher in these days of advertising. But quiet pastoral duty with its absorbing demands upon the spiritual as well as the physical resources of a minister is done out of sight of the public, and promises nothing to the love either of sensationalism or notoriety. The ends it seeks and the rewards it gains are such as only a true lover of souls will value. "John Watson," he says, "never stood so high in my eyes as when I came to know how assiduous was his visitation of his flock, and with what keenness he had studied the problems and the methods of pastoral care." He made it a point to visit each member of his great congregation every year. This was by no means the whole of his pastoral labour. He was tenderly watchful in times of joy, and especially in times of sorrow. He comforted assiduously the sick, the dying, the bereaved. It was much more by his presence than by letters that he did his work, though every member of his flock was made conscious that at no turn or epoch of his life was he forgotten by his pastor. It has to be remembered that in all probability he added very little to the outward strength of his church by this toil. Hardly any minister in his position would consider it necessary. His congregation for many years taxed the limits of his church, and would have been more numerous still if he had not refused to have a larger building. He found his reward in the strong ties that bound himself to his people, and also in the consciousness of having done his duty, for he would often repeat the saying, "Duty done is the soul's fireside." . . . Watson was a true shepherd of souls. His people were always in his heart. He claimed identity with them in the joys and sorrows and endless vicissitudes of life. No friend was blessed with any good gift of God but he was also richer. No household suffered but he was poorer; no one resisted temptation but he was stronger; no one failed but he was weaker. He inquired and planned about all his young men, trying to find spheres for them or to stimulate them in their work, or to protect them from temptation.[1]

[1] W. Robertson Nicoll, "*Ian Maclaren*": *Life of the Rev. John Watson*, 117.

EZEKIEL.

II.

The Personality of Ezekiel.

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The Personality of Ezekiel.

So the Spirit lifted me up, and took me away: and I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit, and the hand of the Lord was strong upon me.—Ezek. iii. 14.

1. Every living "word" must be made flesh and dwell among us; live in a human and personal life, breathe our warm breath, grasp us with sympathetic and friendly hands, carry our sins and bear our sorrows, if it is to gain admission at "lowly doors"; stir the "spirit's inner deeps"; compel and inspire to an ampler life the reluctant souls of men. Disembodied ideas are very poor things in themselves, mere ghosts with which we may talk in our dreams, but from which we get little satisfying guidance, and less veritable strength in our hard workaday life. True it is that lilies preach innocence without words, and violets whisper humility without lips; that thoughts are made potent by poetry, eloquent by the artist's brush, and soothing and rousing by harp and organ; but it is when they throb and glow with the magnetism of an apt and living personality that they transfuse the soul with their greatness, fire the imagination with their flame, compel us to "clutch the golden keys and mould a mighty state's decrees," and ever move from high to higher, and "without haste, without rest," on to the highest. The maximum of power is never gained by ideas till they possess and sway the "body prepared for them," and clothe themselves with the subtle and mysterious influence of a vital and impressive personality.

And what is a personality? A combination of heredity and environment? Both heredity and environment are to be reckoned with. They account for temperamental differences and difficulties; explain the greater or less strength of the obstacles to be faced and mastered; assist in determining the quantity of credit really due to an individual for any particular work, show the reasons why that which is easy to one is enormously difficult to

another; and they are the cause of some of the suffering and misery in the human lot. But the real duty of the individual to God and to his fellow remains intact, springs out of his spiritual relations and powers, and binds him to be and do the highest and best possible to him, where he is and as he is. The man is not made by his "environment" or his ancestry. He makes himself. Guilt *must* be his own. He is an individual; he knows it, he feels it, and in his best and noblest moods he looks with ineffable scorn on the doctrine that he is the helpless slave of his body and bias.

2. More interesting than his writings and his importance for the development of Jewish thought is Ezekiel's own personality. We have the materials for knowing Ezekiel as well as any man in the Old Testament; perhaps, with the single exception of St. Paul, as well as any man in the whole Bible. The great characters of earlier history leave us with the problem of separating what later ages thought about them from what they were themselves; the writers of the prophetic as of the apostolic age leave us with equally difficult problems as to the time, order, and occasion of their writings—of our only data, that is to say, for becoming acquainted with the men themselves. But in the case of Ezekiel these problems are hardly suggested. We have a series of writings to which for the most part dates are carefully attached, and which reveal an orderly connexion both with one another and with the course of their author's thought and experiences. In the Book of Isaiah—and even in the first thirty-nine chapters of the book—is included much that modern study has attributed to later times. The writings of Jeremiah have strangely and almost hopelessly lost their chronological sequence. Even the "minor" prophets reveal themselves as compilations of different times and often of different authors. But the unity and orderliness of Ezekiel's works is striking and practically unquestioned; and the personality which they reveal is not less striking.

At first sight, the impression left by reading Ezekiel is disappointing and even repellent. All that is best in him seems borrowed from Jeremiah; all the rest nothing more than the product of a mind unable to separate the kernel of true religion from

the husk of formula and ritual. But closer study reveals the opposite. What seemed mere enthusiasm for ritual now shows itself as a scrupulous and earnest conscientiousness, to which every command of God is important, simply because it is from God; which feels a single infringement of the law to be a breaking of the whole, and which is perfectly familiar with the truth, still only half learnt, that in religion the bodily and the mental, the inner and the outer, must for ever influence and react on one another.

I.

His Experience of Life.

1. Of Ezekiel's life and circumstances before he was carried into captivity with King Jehoiachin in the year 597 we have no direct information, beyond the facts that he was a priest and that his father's name was Buzi. One or two inferences, however, may be regarded as reasonably certain. We know that that first deportation of Judæans to Babylon was confined to the nobility, the men of war, and the craftsmen; and since Ezekiel was neither a soldier nor an artisan, his place in the train of captives must have been due to his social position. He must have belonged to the upper ranks of the priesthood, who formed part of the aristocracy of Jerusalem. He was thus a member of the house of Zadok; and his familiarity with the details of the Temple ritual makes it probable that he had actually officiated as a priest in the national sanctuary.

Moreover, a careful study of the book gives the impression that he was no longer quite a young man when he received his call to the prophetic office. He appears as one whose views of life are already matured, who has outlived the buoyancy and enthusiasm of youth, and learned to estimate the moral possibilities of life with the sobriety that comes through experience. This impression is confirmed by the fact that he was married and had a house of his own from the beginning of his work, and probably at the time of his captivity. But the most important fact of all is that Ezekiel had lived through a period of unprecedented public calamity, and one fraught with the most momentous

consequences for the future of religion. Moving in the highest circles of society, in the centre of the national life, he must have been fully cognisant of the grave events in which no thoughtful observer could fail to recognize the tokens of the approaching dissolution of the Hebrew State.

¶ One strong and beneficial influence a vigorous and high-minded aristocracy is calculated to exert upon a robust and sound people. I have had occasion, in speaking of Homer, to say very often, and with much emphasis, that he is *in the grand style.* It is the chief virtue of a healthy and uncorrupted aristocracy, that it is, in general, in this grand style. That elevation of character, that noble way of thinking and behaving, which is an eminent gift of nature to some individuals, is also often generated in whole classes of men (at least when these come of a strong and good race) by the possession of power, by the importance and responsibility of high station, by habitual dealing with great things, by being placed above the necessity of constantly struggling for little things. And it is the source of great virtues. It may go along with a not very quick or open intelligence; but it cannot well go along with a conduct vulgar and ignoble. A governing class imbued with it may not be capable of intelligently leading the masses of a people to the highest pitch of welfare for them; but it sets them an invaluable example of qualities without which no really high welfare can exist.[1]

2. Ezekiel's call to the prophetic office came in the fifth year of his captivity (592 B.C.). It took with him, as with the prophets generally, the form of a vision. This vision is described at length in chapters i. to iii. In reading these chapters we are impressed with the contrast which they present to the account of Isaiah's call (Is. vi.). Isaiah, with a few strokes, sets the whole scene before us. Ezekiel, on the other hand, goes into elaborate detail, describing the minutest features of the vision. This literary method meets us not only here but in various parts of the book.

We must think of Ezekiel as having left the town or village in which he dwelt, and going forth alone to the banks of the river Chebar. There came upon him that strange ineffable thrill through nerve and brain for which the prophets of Israel could find no other expression than that "the hand of the Lord was on them," the ecstasy of one who "falls into a trance, having his eyes open";

[1] Matthew Arnold, *Mixed Essays.*

and to him, in that ecstasy, as afterwards to Stephen and to Christ, the "heavens were opened," and he saw "visions of God." The theophany seemed to Ezekiel, as Jeremiah's vision had seemed to him, to come from the North, partly, perhaps, because the expectations of men turned to that region as pregnant with the new nations, Scythians, Medes, Persians, and the like, and the new events, which were to determine the coming history of his people; partly also, because it was associated, as in Job xxxvii. 22, with the idea of clearness and of brightness, and so with that of the "terrible majesty" of God. And there he beheld a vision of unutterable glory, the nearest approximation to which, as a help to our powers of imagining the unimaginable, may be found in the marvellous brightness, incandescent and irradiant, of a northern aurora.

¶ There are times when God reasons with us, gently and at length; and though He has from the first the best of the argument, He permits the discussion to continue, so that we may help to work our own conviction. He allowed Moses, He allowed Jeremiah, He allowed Luther, to discuss the new call of life; but with Ezekiel He seems almost peremptory. We may confidently assume that there was that in Ezekiel's character which demanded such urgency on God's part. Did not Christ also, while He would almost dissuade the eagerness of one too forward disciple, quicken another's halting step as by a strong pull of the hand?—"Leave the dead to bury their own dead; but go thou and publish abroad the kingdom of God." Ezekiel, too, might have been tempted to wait for the funeral of a dying nation's glory, mute and pensive and unfruitful, but that, even while he sat in his house, "the hand of the Lord God fell there" upon him. He yielded himself entirely to its rule; it led him through gloomy shades and close to many a shuddering precipice; but its very absoluteness was his peace.[1]

¶ What a blessed repose and rest doth that soul enjoy that hath resigned itself and gives a constant, unintermittent consent to the Divine government; when it is an *agreed, undisputed* thing that God shall always lead and prescribe, and it follow and obey.[2]

3. Some years later the prophet passed from the mount of visions to the bleak and narrow passes of experience. One morning, as he was going forth to his task, the word of the Lord

[1] H. E. Lewis, *By the River Chebar*, 8. [2] John Howe.

came to him: "Son of man, behold, I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke: yet neither shalt thou mourn nor weep, neither shall thy tears run down." He went on his way, dazed, but faithful to his duty: "So I spake unto the people in the morning; and at even my wife died; and I did in the morning as I was commanded." The story is told in briefest words, and not for its own sake, we might say, but because of its symbolic value to the nation: "Thus Ezekiel is unto you a sign." But we are surely not to understand that the wife died because of the exigencies of a symbol. Man and man's life have a value of their own to God; they are more precious to Him than symbols can ever be. They may become symbolic by a secondary purpose, but man is more than the allegory. Perhaps we may fairly infer that the prophet had his temptation in the very sweetness of the home. Certainly men meant to be prophets have sometimes been spoilt by a too sunny, a too easeful, hearth. May this account for God's peremptoriness at first in impressing Ezekiel into the prophetic office? The desire of his eyes had, it may be, unconsciously made him dull at times to follow the gleam.

> She is mine,
> My fair white lamb, mine only one; whilst Thou
> Hast many in Thy calm fold on the hill
> Of frankincense and myrrh. Lord, be content
> To lead Thy flock where shining waters sleep,
> And leave the poor man in the wilderness
> His one ewe lamb!

So he might have pleaded, but he had to yield her up. The morning light was clouded with the foreshadow of bereavement; still he spoke God's word:

> For no weak tears
> May fall upon the sacred fire; no sound
> Of breaking human heart may mar the full
> Majestic music of a Prophet's voice,
> Speaking to all the ages from the mount
> Of cloud and vision.

The very bareness of the story makes the tragedy more real. It is as if a thin, helpless mist fluttered above an earthquake's chasm, making it more dreadful in half hiding it. Had he

written more, we might have felt less. He simply went forth, with bowed head, through death's "nest of nights,"

> To speak for God—with such strange calm as God
> Can give to dying men, or men with hearts
> More dark than death could make them.

"At even my wife died"—their last day was spent apart—"and I did in the morning as I was commanded." He took up life's burden in death's very sanctuary, and went on bravely till the end.

> By my ruined home
> I stand to speak for God, and stretch my hands,
> Emptied of their sweet treasure, in God's name
> To all the people.

¶ John Semple was of Ezekiel's school, as the following passage from Patrick Walker's story of his life shows: "That night after his wife died, he spent the whole ensuing night in prayer and meditation in his garden. The next morning, one of his elders coming to see him, and lamenting his great loss and want of rest, he replied, 'I declare I have not, all night, had one thought of the death of my wife, I have been so taken up in meditating on heavenly things. I have been this night on the banks of Ulai, plucking an apple here and there!'"

So the ancient struggle is continued—God against the home; and God has still His victories. But His victories finally mean the re-establishment of the home, in a "home not made with hands."

> And when at length
> The evening-time of my long day shall come,
> And God shall give me leave to lay aside
> The prophet's mournful mantle for the robe
> Of joy and light—when at His gate I find
> An everlasting entrance, there my love
> Shall meet me smiling.

"And I did in the morning as I was commanded."[1]

4. The picture which the prophet gives of the life of the exiles and their circumstances is singularly colourless. His interests were exclusively religious, and any insight which he affords us is into the religious condition of his fellow-captives, from whose

[1] H. E. Lewis, *By the River Chebar*, 16.

mouth he occasionally quotes an expression very suggestive as to their state of mind. His own mind was occupied with the largest conceptions, and the exiles were to his eye representatives of a larger subject. When bidden go to "them of the captivity" he felt sent to the "house of Israel," and while addressing his fellow-exiles he fancied before him the people in Canaan or the nation scattered abroad throughout the world. This identification of the exiles with the people as a whole, and this occupation of the prophet's mind with great national interests, make it difficult to know how far in his apparent addresses to the exiles he is touching upon their actual practices. Nothing is more likely than that the captives continued the evil courses in which they had grown up at home, so far as this was possible in a foreign land. They certainly shared in the fanaticism or optimism of those left in the country, and heard with incredulity the prophet's predictions of the speedy downfall of the city. It is known from Jeremiah that there were false prophets among the exiles, who confirmed them in their delusive hopes, and Ezekiel might refer to these prophets in such passages as chapters xiii. and xiv.

¶ The false prophet in Jerusalem and in Babylon was often a man endowed for higher things, but robbed of his reward through fear of his times. He suffered the smile of an age to disinherit his soul of God's perfect praise. And we who live here and now are similarly tried and tempted. Europe to-day with mailed fist bids its prophets prophesy smooth things. Unpatriotic has almost become synonymous with speaking the unpleasant truth too plainly. But there is still that stands true. Archbishop Abbot stood alone in that unholy Court. "Shall I, to please King James, and to shelter and satisfy his vile favourites—shall I send my soul to hell?" shouted Archbishop Abbot to one of the King's emissaries. "No, I will not do it." So Jeremiah stood in Jerusalem "alone," because of God's "hand": "As for me, I have not hastened from being a pastor to follow thee: neither have I desired the woeful day; thou knowest: that which came out of my lips was right before thee." And so Ezekiel stood in Babylon: "Behold, I have made thy face strong against their faces, and thy forehead strong against their foreheads. As an adamant harder than flint have I made thy forehead: fear them not, neither be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house." It is easier to be honest in a foreign tongue under such circumstances; it would have been so much more comfortable for

Ezekiel if he had been allowed to pronounce his awful words of doom in any other than his mother's tongue. But it was not to be so. "For thou art not sent to a people of a strange speech and of an hard language, but to the house of Israel."[1]

5. Once his ministry was terribly vindicated by what seemed to be a direct act of Providence. He stood face to face with the princes of the people, denouncing in scathing terms their social iniquities, and pronouncing immediate judgments upon them. "And it came to pass, when I prophesied, that Pelatiah, the son of Benaiah, died." Who can hate the dead? Charlotte Brontë, watching the dead face of the brother who had wronged them all so much, felt, as she never felt before, the supremacy of forgiveness. "All his errors—to speak plainly, all his vices—seemed nothing to me in that moment; every wrong he had done, every pain he had caused, vanished; his sufferings only were remembered; the wrench to the natural affections only was left. If man can thus experience total oblivion of his fellow's imperfections, how much more can the Eternal Being, who made man, forgive His creature?" Something of the same reconciling emotion swept over Ezekiel, seeing his dead prince. "Then fell I down upon my face, and cried with a loud voice, and said, Ah Lord God! wilt thou make a full end of the remnant of Israel?" And it is interesting to observe that the rest of the chapter contains a most gracious hope of restoration, and an evangelical promise of the new heart. It is well that he who brings down the lightning should himself be humbled by its coming.

¶ Have you ever, in your theological quests, studied the face of the dead? Is there not also a revelation there? We have looked upon many—faces of poor, insignificant people, faces of indifferent livers; also upon great faces. And what do we find there? For one thing, the deep religiousness of death. All religion is there; its mystery, its sublimity. No one can pass irreverently into a death-chamber. The face there, in its grand, calm immobility, with everything of littleness wiped out, speaks of the essential greatness of man, of the soul. And is there not here something more? Is there not here nature's seal of uttermost forgiveness, her seal of the goodness, the love that is above all? That rugged, worn face, furrowed in life with so many lines of care and struggle—she has wiped out all that as though it were

[1] H. E. Lewis, *By the River Chebar*, 25.

nothing, and brought to it the sweetness, the freshness of a little child. A child we come into this world, with loving faces all around us. And this dead, beautiful face—is it not that also of a child, born into another world, and again with loving faces all around it?[1]

II.

His Response to Life.

1. Ezekiel presents a singular contrast to Jeremiah. The primary message delivered to each was, it is true, very nearly the same. Both needed courage in the midst of great difficulty and opposition. Jeremiah was to be an iron pillar and brazen walls to resist the attacks of the people and their rulers; Ezekiel's forehead was to be as an adamant harder than flint, though he dwelt among scorpions, and thorns and briars were with him. But there was a striking difference even in the way in which this message was conceived by the two men. What Jeremiah contemplated was in a large measure an attack against himself. With Ezekiel the prevailing thought is the obstinacy of the people and their rebellion against Jehovah, and the possible danger is that the prophet himself may be seduced to share their rebellious spirit. In the sequel this difference shows itself very markedly. For although both were inflexible and conscientious in the fulfilment of their mission, Ezekiel was beyond all doubt the sterner and the more resolute spirit. Unlike Jeremiah, he is not overwhelmed by personal grief at the sadness of his message. Again, although there was no lack of moral courage in Jeremiah as day by day he faced his opponents to "constantly speak the truth and boldly rebuke vice," yet he bitterly resented the persecution of which he was the victim. Ezekiel, on the other hand, does not flinch as he throws himself with iron steadfastness into the same struggle, nor has he ever a word of personal complaint. True, the opposition which he encountered did not take the form of actual persecution, but it was hardly human not to feel as a personal grievance the obstinacy of his countrymen. And yet, on the whole, Ezekiel was respected by his fellow-captives, and was frequently consulted by their leaders. To some extent this was

[1] J. Brierley, *Faith's Certainties* (1914), 120.

also true of Jeremiah, although in Ezekiel's case it was probably largely due to his fine independence and to the complete absence of sensitiveness. Nothing seems to ruffle that calm, rugged, indomitable spirit.

¶ Recording a life in which so very much was accomplished as in that of Sir John Lubbock's, and in noting, year by year, the results of his extraordinary power and facility of work, it is difficult to avoid giving the impression of a man going at breathless speed, of one totally absorbed in his many projects and practical and scientific interests, of one who can have had no spare time for indulging the domestic affections and enjoying the domestic life. Such a picture would be very different indeed from a true one of Sir John. So far from the impression that he gave being one of breathless haste, as it were of an animated hurricane rushing from one sphere to another of activity, the atmosphere that he bore about him was invariably one of the most serene, unruffled calm. More than that, it was a calm which seemed as if it could not possibly be ruffled. His serenity, in peculiarly trying circumstances, more than once struck those who witnessed it as so remarkable that they have been disposed to ask if it must not be a cold nature that could be thus unruffled. The truth was far otherwise. Few men have been endowed by nature with sensibilities so keen and so nearly feminine in their delicacy.[1]

2. A very characteristic element in the predictions of Ezekiel is his free but careful use of imagery and symbolism. Both are employed by other prophets. Abijah, for example, gives point to his assertion that Jeroboam had been chosen to lead the revolt of the Northern Kingdom by rending his new mantle into twelve pieces, ten of which he gave to the incredulous overseer. Isaiah, by walking thinly clad and barefoot, made a vivid prediction of the threatened captivity of Judah. When Jeremiah wished to impress upon his sceptical audience the destruction which Jehovah was about to visit upon the city of Jerusalem, he dashed an earthen jar to fragments in their presence. By such actions these incomparable preachers enforced their messages. Teaching by symbols not only ensured the attention of their hearers and added to the impressiveness of their words, but often conveyed an idea the open expression of which might have been dangerous or inexpedient. Even more constantly do the prophets make use of

[1] *Life of Sir John Lubbock, Lord Avebury* (1914), i. 145.

various forms of imagery to illumine and beautify their addresses. Isaiah's parable which likened Judah to an unfruitful vineyard, and Micah's bold series of paronomasias by which he announced the approach of danger, illustrate in strikingly different ways this tendency. All other prophets, however, are surpassed by Ezekiel in the use of figurative language. He rarely puts forward an idea without some embellishment. Sometimes he proposes a riddle to his hearers, or utters a parable which he also illustrates by a symbolic action, or he unfolds an elaborate allegory, in each case making the figure of speech a mere means to the end of expressing his message more effectively. But he stands peculiar in his remarkable use of symbolism, especially of the vision, which is a higher form of the same mental tendency. He passes readily from the simpler forms of symbolism, like the metaphor, the parable, and some form of objective action, to the most complex, such as the allegory and the vision.

¶ The prophet's symbolical actions have been variously understood. It is beyond doubt that actions of this kind were occasionally performed by prophets. Zedekiah made him "horns of iron" wherewith to push. Jeremiah put a yoke upon his own neck, which Hananiah broke from off him. The symbolical act in chap. li. 59–64 may also have been literally executed, as well as that in xix. 10. Whether his act in hiding his girdle was real or not may be doubtful; the fact that the sign was continued for three years rather tells against a literal performance of it; and it may be held certain that Jeremiah did not send yokes to the kings of Edom and Moab. It is possible that Ezekiel may in some cases have had recourse to this forcible way of impressing his teaching. Some of the actions described might well have been performed, such as joining two sticks together into one to represent the future union under one king of Judah and Israel. He might also have refrained from all outward mourning on the death of his wife, as a sign of the silent grief under which the people would pine away when tidings reached them of the destruction of the city and the death of all dear to them. But on the other hand how could the prophet "eat his bread with quaking, and drink his water with trembling" as a sign to the house of Israel? And can it be seriously supposed that he actually took a sharp sword as a razor and shaved off the hair of his head and beard, burning a third of it in the city (what city?), smiting a third of it with the sword about the walls, and scattering the remaining third to the winds? Such actions, and others like

them, could not have been performed, and this fact casts doubt on the literality even of those which were possible. Even if 190 days be the true reading in iv. 5, it is most improbable that the prophet should have lain on his side immovable for half a year, and it appears impossible when other actions had to be done simultaneously.[1]

3. A marked characteristic of the form of Ezekiel's teaching is his use of visions. They may correspond to the prophet's temperament, to a naturally imaginative cast of mind. God makes use of the natural gifts of His servants. These shape, to some extent at least, the form which their communications take. But there is no ground for regarding Ezekiel's visions as merely a literary artifice, as nothing more than the form in which he chose to clothe his message. On several occasions, we are told, "the hand of Jehovah was upon him"; in other words, he was the subject of an overpowering Divine influence, and fell into a kind of prophetic trance or ecstasy. This was the case when he saw the vision of the glory of Jehovah which was the prelude to his call. It was the case when he saw the vision of the shameless iniquities committed in the very Temple, by which the inhabitants of Jerusalem were banishing the presence of Jehovah from its precincts. It was the case again, when he beheld the vision of the dry bones brought to life by the inspiration of the breath of God, to teach the desponding Israelites that life could be restored even to the dry and scattered fragments of the nation. It was the case once more, when he saw rising before him a glorious picture of the restored sanctuary, in which Jehovah would once more vouchsafe to dwell in the midst of a purified people.

The simplest and most beautiful of all the visions is that of the dry bones and their resurrection. Three elements are observable in it: first, certain truths and ideas in the prophet's mind, truths not new but often expressed elsewhere, at least partially, such as the idea of the people's restoration; secondly, the operation on these truths of the prophet's mental genius, giving them a unity, throwing them into a physical form, and making them stand out before the eye of his phantasy as if presented to him from without; and thirdly, there may be a certain literary embellishment. This last element is most conspicuous in the visions of the

[1] A. B. Davidson.

cherubim and of the new Temple. But it must be maintained that the second element, the constructive operation of the phantasy, was always present, and that the visions are not mere literary invention.

¶ God may communicate special revelations of His nature or of His will by visions and locutions. Such visions or locutions may be (*a*) imaginary, by which term is meant that they are apprehended like ordinary sights or sounds, except that the perception is due to no stimulus from outside; it is an "image," not a "sensation." In such cases there is a distinct psycho-physical process; the visual or auditory area of the cortex is stimulated, not, however, by an impulse travelling from an end-organ along a sensory nerve tract, as in the case of a sensation, but by an impulse originating in the cortex and impinging on the middle part of the sensory-motor arc. The result of such an impulse is usually a mere memory-image, but occasionally the image has the quality of vividness which is the characteristic of a sensation, and at such times a vision is seen and a locution is heard in an experience to which the terms "clairvoyance" and "clairaudience," or hallucination, are sometimes applied.

When such experiences are accepted as a Divine message, we hold that the contact between God and the soul stimulates the cortex of the brain to the production of the resulting perception, which has all the vividness of a sensation of sight or sound. If the spontaneous action of the "ego" can elicit memory-images of visions and voices, the action of God in the "ego" may well produce an experience of visions and voices which, though spiritual in its origin, will be sensationalistic in its vivid reality.

Or (*b*) these special communications may be *intellectual*, where there is nothing that can strictly be called perception, but rather a forcible and authoritative stamping of some truth upon the mind, or, in a word, a *revelation* of a truth. Such communication involves a contact of God with the human soul; its psychical accompaniment will be a stimulus of the association areas of the brain, and the resulting "idea" will differ from ordinary ideas in the qualities of strength, operativeness, and persistence, combined with an elevating and tranquillizing power, which mark it as of divine origin.[1]

4. Some recent interpreters have suggested the theory that throughout the earlier part of his ministry Ezekiel laboured under nervous diseases of the most distressing kind, and utilized his

[1] A. Chandler, *The Cult of the Passing Moment* (1914), 43.

symptoms as a means of impressing certain truths on the minds of his fellow-exiles. This view was first expounded, with great learning and ingenuity, by Klostermann, who found in Ezekiel's condition all the marks of catalepsy, hemiplegia, alalia, hallucination, and so forth. It is difficult to believe that he has advanced the cause of sober and scientific interpretation of Scripture. The truth would seem to lie rather with those writers who also regard these representations as imaginative symbols, interesting as illustrations of the prophet's mode of thought, but not answering to anything external to his life. Probably Ezekiel was no more a cataleptic than St. Paul; with equal probability he was what would now be called a "psychical" subject—and, as such, liable to trances—and perhaps a clairvoyant. In any case, he would appear to be gifted with those powers of passing "over the threshold" which a great many of us possess to some slight degree, perhaps without discovering it, and which he himself, living before the days of strict medical investigation or nomenclature, could describe only by the categories at his command.

¶ "The soul while thus seeking after God," Teresa says, "is conscious, with a joy excessive and sweet, that it is, as it were, fainting away in a kind of trance; breathing and all the bodily strength fail it, so that it cannot even move the hands without great pain; the eyes close involuntarily, and if they are open they are as if they saw nothing. The ear hears, but what is heard is not comprehended. It is useless to try to speak, because it is not possible to conceive a word; all bodily strength vanishes, and that of the soul increases, to enable it better to have the fruition of its joy."

These last words lead to a consideration on the positive side of the principle of ecstasy, or rapture. Teresa, in describing the external phenomena of this state, places the annihilation of the senses specially before our eyes. . . . "The soul," she tells us, "feels her strength increase in proportion to the weakening of the exterior senses, so that she can better enjoy her bliss. She loses herself in God. She no longer exists, but God exists in her. It is true that her powers are suspended, and lose their natural activity; but a sweet and ineffable feeling replaces the other and absorbs her utterly; this is the consciousness of the Divine Presence."[1]

[1] Lady Lovat and R. H. Benson, *The Life of St. Teresa* (1914), 110.

5. There remains to be considered the title, "Son of man," which is given to Ezekiel throughout the book, and which occurs at the beginning of all his prophecies. It has a special interest because in the Old Testament Ezekiel, with the exception of Daniel, is the only individual to whom the title is applied, and that title, generally in the more definite form, "the Son of man," is appropriated by our Lord to Himself in all the four Gospels, apparently with an implied reference to Dan. vii. 13: "There came with the clouds of heaven one like unto a son of man" (this idea is reproduced in Rev. i. 13, xiv. 14). Outside the Gospels the title is certainly used of our Lord only once, without any expression of similitude, and that by St. Stephen:—"Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God." In the Old Testament it is used generally and not particularly, *e.g.*, in Ps. viii. 4.

> What is man, that thou art mindful of him?
> And the son of man, that thou visitest him?

In such a passage as this the title "son of man" implies humility to God-ward, but a certain sense of superiority in relation to the rest of the natural world.

Ezekiel was specially impressed with the sense of Jehovah's awful holiness. He felt himself a weak, sinful man; he saw in humility the crowning virtue of man to God-ward; and just as he falls upon his face when he hears the Divine voice speaking to him and needs the help of the Spirit to set him on his feet again, so at the beginning of all his oracles he places the words "Son of man," to be a constant reminder to his hearers as to himself of his weakness and mortality and creaturely dependence upon the Lord.

¶ Had Ezekiel been, like Jonah, a mere trumpet of judgment, he would have forfeited his right to a title that was greater than he knew. But when he yielded his soul to bear the iniquity which he so scathingly denounced, he made himself not only a brother of men, but a veritable brother of *the* Son of Man. Scoffing and scorn did not silence his prayer, laughter and the tears of hypocrisy did not quench his love for the race.

How mocked the rude,—how scoffed the vile,—
How stung the Levites' scornful smile
As o'er my spirit, dark and slow,
The shadow crept of Israel's woe,
As if the Angel's mournful roll
Had left its record on my soul,
And traced in lines of darkness there
The picture of its great despair![1]

III.

His Influence on Life.

1. Ezekiel holds a very important place in the religious development of the Jews. In fact he has been aptly compared with such masterful personalities as Gregory VII. and Calvin, as one who by sheer energy of character and force of thought impressed an ineffaceable stamp on the religion of his age. As we have seen, the great and complicated system of sacrifices belonging to the second Temple owed its inception very largely to him. He may therefore be regarded as the connecting link between the Prophets and the Law, and as the father of Judaism with its legalism, dogmatism, and ceremonialism. We should not, however, make the very serious mistake of judging that movement by what it seems to have become—a mere lifeless routine of very exact, but to many probably quite unmeaning, ceremonies. The Book of Ezekiel and the Code of Holiness teach us a different lesson. We see that the movement was, at least in its inception, intensely spiritual.

2. The importance of Ezekiel arises mainly out of two facts. First, he lived through the great crisis of the fall of Jerusalem and the beginning of the Exile, and lived long enough to look back upon it. His own faith survived that crisis, and through him others were enabled to persist. Thus it was largely due to Ezekiel that revealed religion was not involved in the fall of the Jewish kingdom, but entered on a new stage of development, over which the prophet exercised great influence. Secondly, the priest and the prophet were so nicely balanced in his character and

[1] H. E. Lewis, *By the River Chebar*, 19.

work that he was enabled to mediate between the sacerdotal and the prophetic tendencies in the religion of Israel. Ezekiel represents a transition and a compromise: the transition from the ancient Israel of the Monarchy to Judaism; and the compromise between the ethical teaching of the prophets and the popular need for ritual.

3. Besides his high moral and spiritual teaching, it was Ezekiel's mission to keep alive among the Jews a sense of their religious unity and political existence. Judaism was never intended to be a cosmopolitan religion; and when the exiles contrasted the colossal splendour of Babylon with their own poor Jerusalem, they needed the message "*Fear not*, thou worm Jacob," and the reminder that they were not to sink into Babylonians, since they had higher hopes and nobler promises. Their tears were to be but as the softening showers which should prepare the soil for a purer seed. It was therefore essential that they should not relapse into the idolatry of their conquerors; and since they had no longer a Temple or sacrifices, it was necessary to insist with the utmost stringency on their ancient and peculiar institution of the Sabbath. Ezekiel has been severely judged because, amid the lofty teachings of his eighteenth chapter, he dwells so strongly on one or two negative and positive rules. The criticism is unjust, because those rules are not meant to include all morality, but are aimed at the dangers which most immediately menaced the national existence—idolatry, impurity, greed, and unkindness. How little the teaching of Ezekiel was akin to Pharisaism may be seen in his insistence on the fact that a new heart and a new spirit are not the reward of merit, but the gift of God's free love. By this mixture of doctrine and morality, by his thorough examination of the problems of sin and punishment, and of repentance and free grace, and by his reference of all questions to the will and glory of God, Ezekiel has earned the title of "the Paul of the Old Testament." Further than this, by his chosen title "Son of man" and its accordance with his deepest thoughts, he becomes a type of Christ.

4. Ezekiel, it must be remembered, was not only a prophet proclaiming the principles on which the future of his nation was

to be based, but also a preacher of repentance and a shepherd of souls, in whom he sought to create a true religious hopefulness in the mercy of God, and a true religious humility as to the merits of man. The 33rd chapter, in which the duties of a prophet, "set as a watchman unto the house of Israel," are finely described, and the personal responsibility of each individual man and the necessity of his repentance in the sight of a holy God are emphasized, is one of the loftiest expressions of ethical teaching we find in the Old Testament. It is all this that gives Ezekiel a permanent value. But it certainly is curious that he is only once directly quoted in the New Testament, and even that doubtfully (2 Cor. vi. 16; Ezek. xxxvii. 27). His symbolism, however, especially that of the cherubim (the four living creatures of Rev. iv. 6, etc.) and the river proceeding from the sanctuary, is largely incorporated in the Apocalypse. Christians have been pleased to see a fulfilment of the latter vision in the healing and fructifying power which comes from their great High Priest, just as they see in Ezekiel's Temple a prefigurement of the Church on earth. It is significant that in this matter the Apocalypse does not take over the imagery of Ezekiel, but points to an even higher ideal, one to be realized, it may be, only in eternity, when the presence of God is so completely known and fully appreciated that there is no need of an earthly temple.

¶ The new Jerusalem of the Apocalypse is an ideal city on an ideal earth. In the historical city the function of the temple had been to symbolize the presence of God in a society which was not wholly and inwardly one with Him. As a local symbol it had at least the appearance of localizing His presence. But in a perfected and redeemed society no such symbol and apparent limitation is required. There is no temple, because the city is all temple. God is no longer anywhere, because He is felt to be everywhere. "The old Jerusalem was all temple. The mediæval church was all temple. But the ideal of the new Jerusalem was —no temple, but a God-inhabited society."[1]

In the desert by the bush,
Moses to his heart said *Hush*.

David on his bed did pray;
God all night went not away.

[1] C. Anderson Scott, *Revelation*, 294.

From his heap of ashes foul
Job to God did lift his soul,

God came down to see him there,
And to answer all his prayer.

On a dark hill, in the wind,
Jesus did His Father find,

But while He on earth did fare,
Every spot was place of prayer;

And where man is any day,
God can not be far away.

But the place He loveth best,
Place where He Himself can rest,

Where alone He prayer doth seek,
Is the spirit of the meek.

To the humble God doth come;
In his heart He makes His home.[1]

[1] George MacDonald, *Poetical Works*, i. 347.

EZEKIEL.

III.

The Preaching of Ezekiel.

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The Preaching of Ezekiel.

The soul that sinneth, it shall die: the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.—Ezek. xviii. 20.

As a preacher Ezekiel stands in somewhat natural sequence to Jeremiah. The two prophets are contrasted in temperament and qualification, yet the younger fitly supplemented what the elder achieved. Jeremiah was the prophet of the destruction of Jerusalem and the reconstitution of Israel's inner religious life. The old conception of Jehovah as a national deity, the patron of Judah's state and ruling in Zion which he would never suffer to be captured (as the oracles of Isaiah had led the people to believe), was to suffer in the days of Jeremiah a rude shock. The city was to be destroyed and the external bases of Hebrew religion were to be swept away. In place of a religion which was circumscribed by the limitations of an ancient local habitation and kingdom there was to succeed a religion that rested upon eternal spiritual grounds, a heart sincerely repentant of all the disloyalty and evil practices of the past, a spirit cleansed from evil and obedient to a new and Divine law of life.

We may consider Ezekiel's message under three divisions—

I. God and His Holiness.
II. The Nation and its Sinfulness.
III. The Individual and his Responsibility.

I.

God and His Holiness.

Ezekiel's ideas of God cannot be said to be specially distinctive when compared with those of his immediate predecessors. The

more thoughtful minds in Israel since the days of the prophet Amos, in the middle of the eighth century B.C., had been gradually emancipated from the old conceptions of Jehovah as a local deity. Isaiah and Jeremiah had in their day striven to deliver Judaism from the fetters imposed by the national limitations of God's purpose or His sphere of work. God had other ends in view than to uphold the Jewish kingdom and national polity. Jehovah's purpose was the establishment of a righteous moral order in, and by means of, Israel as an instrument. But that instrument must be conformed to its moral end. His sphere of work was not Israel only, but the world. This universal sovereignty, taught successively by Amos, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, is presupposed in the oracles of Ezekiel. The destinies of foreign nations are subject to His supreme control, and oracles are devoted to the fate of individual races or kingdoms by all these prophets. Jehovah brought the Syrians from Kir and the Philistines from Caphtor, as well as the Israelites from Egypt (Amos). Assyria was the rod of His Divine wrath for the chastisement of guilty Israel (Isaiah), and similarly Nebuchadnezzar, according to Ezekiel, had accomplished God's judgment against Tyre, and, as a faithful servant, deserved a reward for so doing.

¶ Every prophet, like every religious teacher, must finally be judged by what he has to tell us about the mind and will and character of God.[1]

1. Under the expression "the name of God," the prophet sums up his ideas of what God essentially is. That name must not be profaned; what God wrought was "for his name's sake," to prevent its profanation; the pity which He would show to Israel was to be exercised for the same reason, and not for their sakes; in the coming time that name was to be known and had in honour by Israel; here we may say that "name" is almost equivalent to "glory"; and in the future God will be jealous (*i.e.*, zealous) for the honour of His holy name. All His dealings with Israel have been and are and will be "for his name's sake." They are designed to manifest His one unchangeable nature. Israel had merited nothing but destruction in the wilderness, but He spared them for His name's sake, "that it should not be profaned in the

[1] W. F. Lofthouse.

sight of the nations." So now it is not for any merit on Israel's part that they will be recalled from exile, but for Jehovah's name's sake. "I do not this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name." The judgment of the nations and the redemption of Israel are both a sovereign exercise of Divine grace in accordance with the immutable character of the Divine nature.

The name by which the prophet calls the God of Israel is "Jehovah," or "the Lord Jehovah." Whether the name "Lord" expresses something judicial or not may be uncertain; it expresses at least something sovereign; but the other name "Jehovah" in Ezekiel's age expressed the idea of God absolutely. Jehovah has all power; the nations as well as Israel are in His hand. He brought Israel out of Egypt, and gave them the good land of Canaan, and He will disperse them among the nations, delivering them over to the king of Babylon; but yet again He will recover them out of the hand of those who have served themselves of them, and will save them with an everlasting salvation. With the same omnipotence He rules among the nations. His judgments fall upon the peoples around Israel—Ammon, Moab, and Edom—whose name He causes to perish among the nations; but they light also on Tyre and even upon Egypt, which He gives into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. He breaks the arm of Pharaoh and strikes the sword out of his hand, putting His own sword into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. He brandishes His sword in the eyes of all the nations, while creation shudders and the waters of the great deep stand motionless. He puts His hook in the jaws of Gog, and brings him up from the ends of the earth, revealing Himself to the most distant lands and the far-off islands of the sea. He reverses the past, bringing again the captivity of Sodom and her daughters. He sends forth His life-giving Spirit, and the nation that was dead, and whose bones were scattered, feels the breath of life and rises to its feet a great army. His rule of the nations is the judgment of the nations; and His verdict upon a nation is seen in the last act which it plays upon the stage of history and is eternal.

¶ Doctrine that is aglow with holy emotion is kindly and uplifting, but if it settles into cold and frosty forms it is apt to become cruel. The opposition in this case [to evangelistic work] chiefly arose from a too sharp Calvinism which went far beyond

Calvin himself and became deadly cold. Martin writes: "Calvinism is imperialism. Many of my countrymen seem to confound God's Sovereignty with *arbitrariness* or the worst form of *absolutism*, and to exclude from the matter of salvation all will of the creature whatsoever, just as others exclude the Divine will and make it depend wholly on the human. God's sovereignty is a sovereignty of love. How grand a thought it is that we have the Divine will on our side. But His will works through *our* wills, not doing them violence, but acting constitutionally. That God's will is for our salvation is the chief incentive to our wills—their greatest inspiration. The truth is that we are upborne and upheld by the Divine will, which is as a stream that bears all who cast themselves upon it onward into the Kingdom of God."[1]

2. Closely connected with the conceptions of the glory and the name of Jehovah is the conception of His holiness. The term "holy" applied to Jehovah is very elastic, and may embrace much or little, one thing or another. To call Jehovah "holy" tells nothing in regard to Him further than that He is God, with the attributes of God. The idea has to be distinguished from the details brought at different times under it. There might be included under the idea the sole Godhead of Jehovah; such natural attributes of Deity as power, manifested in the rule of nature, or in judgments on the enemies of His people; moral attributes, as punitive righteousness, or ethical purity; and finally physical, or what might be called æsthetic, purity. When Jehovah reveals Himself as that which He is, or in any of His attributes and aspects of that which He is, He "sanctifies" Himself. Hence to "magnify" or "glorify" Himself or set His glory among the nations are particulars coming under the more general "sanctify." In like manner men "sanctify" Jehovah when they recognize that which He is or ascribe to Him His true nature. On the other hand, when the iniquities of His people constrain Him to act in such a way as to disguise any of His great attributes, such as His power, in the eyes of the nations, so that they misinterpret His Being, his holy name is "profaned," as on the contrary He is "sanctified" in the eyes of the nations by the restoration of His people and their defence when restored and righteous.

¶ Rightly to understand what Yahweh's holiness meant to

[1] N. C. Macfarlane, *Rev. Donald John Martin* (1914), 91.

Ezekiel, we must have undergone Ezekiel's experiences; we must have seen the women weeping for Tammuz, and bringing to the crowds who thronged the temple courts at Jerusalem all the lewd ideas of the baser Oriental mythology; we must have watched the twenty-five men deliberately defying Yahweh in Yahweh's own house, or Nebuchadnezzar plying his divinations to decide whether Judah or Ammon should be his first victim. We must have marked with scorn and fear like Ezekiel's the degraded yet alluring idolatries of heathenism, so dangerous because so similar to the rites to which Israel had already been accustoming herself for years in Palestine; we must have grown indignant over the torrent of commercial dishonesty and greed which had swept away the remnants of the old Israelite simplicity and goodness, and wept in anguish at the thought that the city which had been created to be the joy of the whole earth, had been humbled by the wicked folly of her own children before the derision and contempt of the heathen world. To Ezekiel, unable to distinguish between the ritual and moral elements in religion, the practices which he saw around him were abominations as horrible as sacrilege and incest are to us.[1]

¶ If now in Christ, God's nature fully discloses itself as love, and it is in regard to His love that He claims to be the One beside whom there is no other, and the Incomparable, what the word *holy* describes is the majesty and sovereignty of His love in general, but in particular the fact that it is true to itself, as shown by its reaction against sin. Of course this is not to say that holiness takes its place alongside of love, and that an adjustment must be brought about between these two fundamental attributes of the Divine nature, as they are supposed to be. On the contrary, it is because it is perfect love that the love of God is Holy Love. Its reaction against sin is itself love, because it is the means for overcoming the opposition to love; and should it punish any persistent opposition to the supreme revelation of love, by departing from its importunate appeals, this also has its ground in the nature of love which cannot force itself. In this way we understand the circumstance that, in the New Testament as a matter of fact, the word *holy* is seldom found; but where it occurs, its main purpose is to give expression to the serious side of love, which is necessarily implied in its nature.[2]

3. Lastly, Jehovah is God over all, and the self-exaltation of peoples or their rulers in any place of the world, as when the

[1] W. F. Lofthouse.

[2] T. Haering, *The Christian Faith*, i. 344.

prince of Tyre says, "I am God," or when the Pharaoh says, "My river is mine, I have made it," is an offence against the majesty of Him who alone is exalted. What might be called moral forces are no less subservient to His will and ruled by Him than those that are physical. The prophet, indeed, represents Jehovah as the Author of all that occurs, whether on the stage of history or in the minds of men. Even the evil that men do is in many instances ascribed to Him, without men, however, being thereby relieved of responsibility for it. In one aspect men's deeds are their own, in another they are occasioned by God. Jerusalem sets her blood-shed on a bare rock, without covering it; but from another point of view it is the Lord Himself who sets it on a bare rock, "that it might cause fury to come up to take vengeance." A prophet allows himself to be enticed, and entering into the purposes of the people—whitewashing the wall which they build—speaks such a prophetic word as fosters their delusive hopes. It is the Lord that deceives this prophet, that both he and those whom he deludes may perish together. The laws given to the people were "good"—statutes of life. But the people neglected and disobeyed them; they perverted their meaning, extending the law of the offering of the firstborn even to children, whom they burnt in the fire. This perversion was caused by God Himself: He gave them laws that were not good, that He might destroy them. Evil things come into the mind of God, He devises an evil device, saying, "I will go to them that are at quiet, . . . to take the spoil, and to take the prey." It is Jehovah that puts hooks in his jaws and brings him forth: "I will bring thee against my land, that the nations may know me, when I shall be sanctified in thee." These representations in Ezekiel are similar to others in Scripture, and, no doubt, raise difficult questions. Perhaps two things may be said in general: first, Jehovah is nowhere represented as causing nations or men to do evil acts, which they are not also represented as doing of their own accord and with evil intent; and secondly, Jehovah is nowhere represented as the Author of sin in such a sense that He causes an innocent mind to sin.

Lord of the whirlwind and the flame,
Bring us to know Thy better name:
Teach us Thy perfectness, that we
May lose all fear in fearing Thee.

Thou, who thro' very strength art kind,
Forgive the limits of our mind;
Forgive the sin that blinds our eyes,
When Thy new morning glories rise.

Thou, who dost fling Thy lightning's wrath
Upon the sinner's devious path,
Make Thou Thy very tempest bring
Us to the shadow of Thy wing!

Clothe with Thy peace our fields of pain,
In clear outshinings after rain:
Come, from the four winds come, O Breath,
Make Easter in our Vale of Death.

Shine from Thy glory, shine within,
Till we have seen the face of sin;
Then speak to us, beside the sea,
The perfect words of Galilee.

II.

The Nation and its Sinfulness.

1. The tone of the prophet towards the people in the early part of his book is severe and threatening, though the threats are here and there relieved with consoling promises and a brighter outlook. In the second half he adopts a kindlier tone. In both parts his teaching agrees in many things with that of his predecessors, particularly Jeremiah.

But Ezekiel goes further than Jeremiah in the way of condemnation, regarding the whole history of Israel as an unbroken record of apostasy and rebellion, while Jeremiah at least looks back to the desert wandering as a time when the ideal relation between Israel and Jehovah was maintained. But on the whole, and especially with respect to the present state of the nation, their judgment is substantially one. The source of all the religious and moral disorders of the nation is infidelity to Jehovah, which is manifested in the worship of false gods and in reliance on the help of foreign nations. Specially noteworthy is the frequent recurrence in Jeremiah and Ezekiel of the figure of "whoredom,"

an idea introduced into prophecy by Hosea to describe these two sins. The extension of the figure to the false worship of Jehovah by images and other idolatrous emblems can also be traced to Hosea; and in Ezekiel it is sometimes difficult to say which species of idolatry he has in view, whether it be the actual worship of other gods or the unlawful worship of the true God. His position is that an unspiritual worship implies an unspiritual deity, and that such service as was performed at the ordinary sanctuaries could by no possibility be regarded as rendered to the true God who spoke through the prophets. From this fountain-head of a corrupted religious sense proceed all those immoral practices which both prophets stigmatize as "abominations" and as a defilement of the land of Jehovah. Of these the most startling is the prevalent sacrifice of children, to which they both bear witness, although, as we shall afterwards see, with a characteristic difference in their point of view.

¶ Idolatry is, both literally and verily, not the mere bowing down before sculptures, but the serving or becoming the slave of any images or imaginations which stand between us and God, and it is otherwise expressed in Scripture as "walking after the *imagination*" of our own hearts. And observe also that while, at least on one occasion, we find in the Bible an indulgence granted to the mere external and literal violation of the second commandment, "When I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing," we find no indulgence in any instance, or in the slightest degree, granted to "covetousness, which is idolatry" (Col. iii. 5; no casual association of terms, observe, but again energetically repeated in Eph. v. 5, "No covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ"); nor any to that denial of God, idolatry in one of its most subtle forms, following so often on the possession of that wealth against which Agur prayed so earnestly, "Give me neither poverty nor riches, lest I be full and deny thee, and say, 'Who is the Lord?'" And in this sense, which of us is not an idolater? Which of us has the right, in the fulness of that better knowledge, in spite of which he nevertheless is not yet separated from the service of this world, to speak scornfully of any of his brethren, because, in a guiltless ignorance, they have been accustomed to bow their knees before a statue? Which of us shall say that there may not be a spiritual idolatry in our own apparent worship?[1]

[1] Ruskin, *Stones of Venice*, ii. appendix 10 (*Works*, x. 451).

2. Ezekiel teaches, not less distinctly than Jeremiah, a doctrine of Divine grace. If there is any prospect of Israel's becoming again the "righteous" or "holy nation" it was Divinely intended to be, dwelling under the shadow of Jehovah's wings and fulfilling His requirement, the only hope of this consummation lies in the action of Jehovah Himself. He alone can "put a new spirit within" the hearts of His people; can "take away the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them an heart of flesh," enabling them to walk in His statutes and to live worthy of their vocation as a people of God. The promise of the Spirit, indeed, is a new note in prophecy, characteristic of the Exilic period. Even Jeremiah does not expressly indicate the agency by which Jehovah will write His law in the hearts of men and so bring His new covenant to accomplishment. Thus Ezekiel's prediction of Israel's future gives a new form to Jeremiah's doctrine that only the power of Jehovah *Himself* can bring about the moral and spiritual renewal which is Israel's sorest need.

3. In connexion with this picture of the future, there are two or three points that call for special attention.

(1) These words of hope were intended chiefly for the exiles. In xi. 14–21 a sharp distinction is drawn between them and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. The latter lay claim to the promises of the past, saying: "Get you far from the Lord; unto us is this land given for a possession." But the prophet replies that it is those who have been removed far off among the nations who are to inherit the land and be, in fact, the people of God. Again, in xxxiii. 23–29, those who remained in the waste places after the fall of Jerusalem are reported as saying, "Abraham was one, and he inherited the land: but we are many; the land is given us for inheritance." To this the prophet replies by declaring that these survivors themselves will be visited by a destructive judgment which will make it clear that possession of the land rests, not upon natural grounds, but upon moral fitness. Everywhere in the Book of Ezekiel it is the returned exiles, and apparently they alone, who are to share in the Messianic salvation. Of those who remained in Palestine, Ezekiel, like Jeremiah, seems to have had a low opinion. The future of Israel's religion, he was convinced, lay with "them of the captivity."

(2) Another point to be observed in connexion with Ezekiel's view of the future is the Divine motive for the restoration of Israel. It is not love, as in Hosea, nor compassion, as in Jeremiah, but jealousy, regard for His own honour. Jehovah would not permit the heathen to profane His holy name by attributing the continuance of Israel's exile to His own weakness. He must therefore restore Israel, in order to convince the nations that He is Jehovah and to sanctify His name in their eyes. Not for Israel's sake, then, was the restoration to be accomplished, but for His own name's sake. Behind this representation lay the great idea that the goal of human history is to be found in the recognition of the sovereign will of God. Reverence for Him as the moral ideal is the basis of all true religion. In the idea also that the restoration of the exiles did not depend upon their own deserts, there was an element of consolation. If they were to be dealt with according to their own merits, there would be little hope for them. Their one ground of confidence lay in the gracious will of God. We have here an anticipation of the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith.

(3) But a more remarkable anticipation of Pauline teaching is to be found in Ezekiel's doctrine of regeneration and the impartation of the Divine Spirit. Israel, before her restoration, and as a condition of it, is to undergo a complete change of character. "I will sprinkle," says Jehovah, "clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgements, and do them." This is one of the high points in Ezekiel's teaching. Jeremiah had already taught the inwardness of true religion and the need of a radical change of heart, but nowhere does he express so clearly as we have it here the idea of the new birth. Ezekiel at this point takes a step beyond Jeremiah.

¶ In the life of every man has there been a day when the heavens opened of their own accord, and it is almost always from that very instant that dates his true spiritual personality. It is doubtless at that instant that are formed the invisible, eternal

features that we reveal, though we know it not, to angels and to souls. . . . Our veritable birth dates from the day when, for the first time, we feel at the deepest of us that there is something grave and unexpected in life. Some there are who realize suddenly that they are not alone under the sky. To others will it be brusquely revealed, while shedding a tear or giving a kiss, that "the source of all that is good and holy from the universe up to God is hidden behind a night, full of too distant stars"; a third will see a divine hand stretched forth between his joy and his misfortune; and yet another will have understood that it is the dead who are in the right. One will have had pity, another will have admired or been afraid. Often does it need almost nothing, a word, a gesture, a little thing that is not even a thought. . . .

We can be born thus more than once; and each birth brings us a little nearer to our God. But most of us are content to wait till an event, charged with almost irresistible radiance, intrudes itself violently upon our darkness, and enlightens us, in our despite. We await I know not what happy coincidence, when it may so come about that the eyes of our soul shall be open at the very moment that something extraordinary takes place. But in everything that happens is there light; and the greatness of the greatest of men has but consisted in that they had trained their eyes to be open to every ray of this light.[1]

III.

The Individual and his Responsibility.

1. A new note is sounded which is even more clearly enunciated by Ezekiel than by Jeremiah — the note of personal responsibility. This was due to the altered political conditions which demanded a change in the religious modes of thought. The old religious ideas were based on the fundamental conception of the race or the clan as the unit of social life as well as of worship. The individual had no place in relation to God save in and through the clan and its common sacra. But the Assyrian invasions of the Palestinian lands and their races since the eighth century had gradually broken up the nationalities and deported the races from the old homes and only possible seats of religious life. It was necessary, therefore, that religion should be based on something

[1] M. Maeterlinck, *The Treasure of the Humble*, 172.

deeper and more permanent than the integrity of the clan and its local sacra. This needful reconstruction of ideas was accomplished by the prophets. For race-religion they substituted personal religion. In the old religion sin and guilt belonged to the race or family. The solidarity of race or family was expressed in the old tradition, reflected in Deut. v. 9, 10, that God would visit the sins of the fathers upon the children. This, of course, operated with wholesome effect as a warning against transgression lest the sons should suffer. And, since the law of inheritance is an established fact of experience, this old conception did not in reality die out. It lived on in later Judaism and in exaggerated forms. The hopes of the nation were based on the piety of David, for whose sake God would continue to be long-suffering. Even in the days of Christ, the Jews relied on the righteousness of holy ancestors and said, "We have Abraham to our father." But a powerful reaction had set in against this old conception in the time of Ezekiel, and no prophet ever gave it more clear and emphatic expression than he. He even denies that the individual ever dies for the sins of the father: "The soul that *sinneth*, it shall die." Neither Noah, Daniel, nor Job could have rescued by their righteousness any but their own souls.

After the fall of Jerusalem, the Jewish nation no longer existed as a nation; only scattered individuals were left. If the prophet believed that the religion of Israel was to have a future, and if he had a mission to work for that future, he must take account of these individuals. From among them the new Israel must be built up; they must be stimulated to faith and hope, else they would lapse into heathenism; and they must be inspired with true ideals, else they might make the religion of Israel worse than heathenism. Hence Ezekiel, in the celebrated eighteenth chapter and elsewhere, declares that individuals will not be hopelessly involved in the ruin of the nation, or in the guilt of their ancestors, or even in the consequences of their own past sins. With the new Israel in prospect each individual may at that moment choose good or evil, and by that choice may determine whether he shall be admitted into the Kingdom of God or excluded from it. The exigencies of a supreme crisis thus led Ezekiel to a formal and explicit enunciation of the principle of individual responsibility.

¶ We have to make a choice and to make it at our peril. We are on a pass, blinded by mist and whirling snow. If we stand still, we shall be frozen to death. If we take the wrong road, we shall be dashed to pieces. We do not certainly know whether there is any right one. What must we do? "Be strong and of a good courage." Act for the best, hope for the best, and take what comes. Above all let us dream no dreams and tell no lies, but go our way, wherever we may land, with our eyes open and our heads erect. If death ends all, we cannot meet it better. If not, let us enter the next scene with no sophistry in our mouths and no masks on our faces.[1]

2. In two directions the sense of responsibility is capable of development—in motive and in content. In proportion as it takes a deeper hold of the human heart, it receives a richer content and a wider sphere of influence. The motive is that with which it grips the heart; the content is the circle over which it reigns. The deeper the tree strikes its roots, the broader are its branches and the vaster its shade. So the more deeply men are gripped by the love and sense of what is right, the more fully and extensively will they apply that principle in ordinary life. Thus the richness of the content and the wideness of the circulation of duty depend in the first instance upon the motive. In the days of Ezekiel it was the fear of God's holiness; in the era of Christian thought it is the love of God's Holy Name. But who can deny that the moral conception and ideal of the prophet prepared the way for the conception and ideal of Christ? The sense of responsibility was exalted, refined, intensified by the teaching of the Master, who exemplified in His life the purest motive and the widest range of duty; but when we remember how much we owe Him for the fuller and grander light we possess, we must not forget those courageous pioneers of the cross, the fearless watchmen on the hills of Israel, staunch shepherds of a faithless flock, who held up the torch of God's holiness in the night of Israel's sin and despair, appealing strongly to the Israelites to cast away their sins, to make them a new heart and a new spirit, and pleading in a softer key, in the name of the Lord Himself, "For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God; wherefore turn yourselves, and live."

[1] J. Fitzjames Stephen, *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity*, 354.

¶ Commentators complain that nobody reads Ezekiel now. It is not certain that St. Paul read him, for he nowhere quotes him. But the redemptive conceptions of the two writers are the same, and appear in the same order: 1. Forgiveness—"I will sprinkle clean water upon you"; 2. Regeneration—"A new heart and spirit"; 3. The Spirit of God as the ruling power in the new life —"I will put My Spirit within you"; 4. The issue of this new principle of life, the keeping of the requirements of God's law— "That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Rom. viii. 4); 5. The effect of living "under grace" in softening the human heart and leading to obedience—"Ye shall remember your evil ways and loathe yourselves"—"Shall we sin because not under law but under grace?" (Rom. vi.–vii.). And, finally, the organic connection of Israel's history with Jehovah's revelation of Himself to the nations.[1]

3. We need Ezekiel's teaching to-day in many ways. The individual is always tempted to hide from himself, or hide from his brother. In a very awful sense the latter is true of him now, because

> Man is parcelled out in men
> To-day, because for any wrongful blow,
> No man, not stricken, asks, "I would be told
> Why thou dost strike"; but his heart whispers then,
> "*He is he, I am I.*"

But this is true of him, because the other is true of him also, that he hides from himself. He is more and more tempted to rely upon the State, or upon the Church. He would hand over all his responsibility to the politician and the priest; but not so are we to outwit the truth of things. Man belongs to himself and to God, and to no other, in the final issue. "Bear ye one another's burdens"—in his relation to his fellow-creatures, "for every man shall bear his own burden"—in his relation to God. Whatever a man may suffer from one or the other, or both, his hell is not from his parents or from his past, while he has the power, by God's help, any moment—any brief, immeasurable moment—to cut his soul loose from the things that are behind, and set sail for the Paradise of God. "The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father. . . . When the wicked man turneth away from his wicked-

[1] A. B. Davidson, *The Theology of the Old Testament*, 343.

ness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive. Because he considereth, and turneth away from all his transgressions that he hath committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die." A man is master of his fate the moment he lets the mercy of God find him.

¶ Man has the power of choice—he determines the character of his own conduct. He has what Shakespeare calls

> A free determination
> 'Twixt right and wrong.

He is the arbiter of his own destiny. There are those who are teaching differently to-day. Not that it is a new form of teaching by any means. It is merely the old revived. Blatchford's excuse for "the bottom dog"—his plea that men ought not to be blamed—is at least as old as Omar Khayyám, the Persian singer of the eleventh century. Listen to him and see if some modern voices are not like his echo:

> We are no other than a moving row
> Of magic shadow-shapes that come and go
> Round with the sun-illumined lantern held
> In midnight by the Master of the Show;
>
> But helpless pieces of the game He plays
> Upon this chequer-board of nights and days,
> Hither and thither moves, and checks, and slays,
> And one by one back in the closet lays.
>
> Oh Thou, who didst with pitfall and with gin
> Beset the road I was to wander in,
> Thou wilt not with predestined evil round
> Enmesh, and then impute my fall to sin!

It means what you have heard, what some of you may have whined out in cowardice, "I can't help it—I'm not responsible, I was driven to it." Of course, we are not so stupid as to imagine that a man's will is not influenced by his heredity or his environment. We are as alive to that as anybody; but we refuse to believe that man is merely a theatre, and his motives and impulses agents. We hold that man has power by his reason and conscience to examine, compare, estimate, and give the casting vote and verdict in favour of a certain course of conduct. He is not driven hopelessly and aimlessly along it by some force which he

cannot control. Reason ought to preside over impulse and passion. No man need be a slave to circumstance, appetite, or heredity. Behind all these influences there is the man himself, who may reign as king in the province of his own conduct.[1]

¶ In one passage in Dr. Rainy's introductory lecture on his appointment as Professor of Church History in the New College he pleads for moral freedom as the great fact and factor in history.

"It is very natural," he remarked, "to say, Give me the laws of the process—give me the constant which is human nature—give me the variable which is the changing circumstance and inheritance of each age—and I will show you what each generation could not help being, thinking, and doing. But here we must affirm, in the field of history as in the field of morals, the great fact of responsibility. We must affirm it, not denying anything that can be shown as to the constant operation of social forces, but still affirming this. We must assert that the true way of stating the problem is to say that at each stage the *constant* is the influence of circumstances as then existing and the inheritance of the past as then received, and the *variable* is man—man with a something, however overlaid and bound, that is never to be reached, at least is never to be expiscated by any calculus: not to speak now of that other variable—the inscrutable administration of grace. . . . History—and most of all Church history—renounces the proper charm and glory of her own marvellous story, when she fails to make room for the freedom and responsibility of man, when she fails to make room also for the freedom of God."[2]

[1] J. E. Wakerley, *The Making of Moral Manhood*, 126.

[2] P. Carnegie Simpson, *The Life of Principal Rainy*, i. 204.

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DANIEL.

O Daniel, thou man greatly beloved.—Dan. x. 11.
Behold, thou art wiser than Daniel.—Ezek. xxviii. 3.

SCARCELY anything is known of the Daniel of history. Like Job, with whom we find him once associated (Ezek. xiv. 14, 20), he was a vaguely grand figure belonging to Israel's dim and distant past. In the traditions he had a name for righteousness. Ezekiel said of the land of Israel in the beginning of the 6th century B.C., "Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord God . . . though Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, as I live, saith the Lord God, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter; they shall but deliver their own souls by their righteousness." And Daniel had a name for wisdom. To the prince of Tyre, lifted up in heart, identifying himself with God, sitting in the seat of God, in the midst of the sea, Ezekiel ironically says, "Behold, thou art wiser than Daniel; there is no secret that they can hide from thee" (Ezek. xxviii. 3).

But as a figure in literature how well is Daniel known, and how greatly beloved! He is the hero of a great and mysterious book written in the time of the Maccabean Wars. Just as the real Hamlet, who is known to all the world, owes little but the outline of his story to old Saxo Grammaticus, and as the historical Faust is little more than a nucleus of the drama which sums up the spirit of the modern age, so the Daniel whom we know, the hero of the book which gives magnificent expression to the spiritual aspirations of the Jews in their conflict with the Greeks, has merely a nominal connexion with the Daniel of tradition. He is the splendid literary creation of one of the grandest periods of Hebrew history. The anonymous writer who embodied his own and his nation's ideals in that heroic and saintly figure shows a sovereign indifference to the details of ancient history, and we should do him

an injustice if we were to demand of him a rigid accuracy to which he lays no claim. But when the figure of Daniel is viewed in the true light, as the ideal of a nation pouring out its life-blood for its spiritual heritage, it does its work upon generation after generation of readers like all the supreme creations of literature.

¶ Rarely did it happen that a book appeared as this did, in the very crisis of the times, and in a form most suited to such an age, ingeniously reserved, close, and severe, and yet shedding so clear a light through obscurity, and so marvellously captivating. It was natural that it should soon achieve a success entirely corresponding to its inner truth and glory. And so, in this book, we have for the last time in the literature of the Old Testament an example of a work which, having sprung from the deepest necessities of the noblest impulses of the age, can render to that age the purest service, and which, by the development of events immediately after, receives with such power the stamp of Divine witness that it subsequently attains imperishable sanctity.[1]

i. The Voice of Conscience.

1. After the Eastern conquests of Alexander the Great, the Jew came into contact with the Greek, and that conflict began between the faith of Israel and the philosophy of Hellas which has been going on for more than two thousand years. "I will stir up thy sons, O Zion, against thy sons, O Javan" (Zech. ix. 13). It was not easy for Athens and Jerusalem to understand and appreciate one another, nor was it any longer possible to ignore one another. During the last three centuries which preceded the Christian era, Palestine lay between the Græco-Syrian monarchy in the North and the Græco-Egyptian monarchy in the South.

¶ From the time of the first Ptolemy's occupation of Jerusalem (320), the Jews remained for nearly a century subject to Egyptian rule, and this was perhaps the happiest period enjoyed by Judea since the loss of her spiritual independence. With the exception of two brief intervals, each lasting about fourteen years, the rule of the Ptolemies was uninterrupted till the year 204. It was a point of policy with the Egyptian monarchs to promote free intercourse between their Hellenic and Asiatic subjects. Greek settlements were planted in Palestine, many of the newly-founded cities being called by Greek names (such as Paneas, Ptolemais, Scythopolis), and the practical result

[1] H. Ewald,

was that Greeks and Macedonians became a numerous and influential element in the population of Western Asia. Ptolemy II. Philadelphus (285–247), a ruler of liberal and enlightened tastes, is specially worthy of mention in this connection. His interest being awakened in the history and literature of his Jewish subjects, he encouraged the work of the Seventy, whose famous version of the Old Testament scriptures was probably begun under his patronage, though it was not completed till the middle of the second century.[1]

2. In the beginning of the second century B.C. there was a strong Hellenizing party in Jerusalem, anxious to break down the barriers which separated Judaism from the Gentile world, and to introduce among the Jews the language, manners, and dress of the Greeks. The ancient empires had transplanted the nations of Palestine to Assyria and Babylonia. The Greeks did not need to remove them to Greece; for they brought Greece to Palestine. "The Orient," says Wellhausen, "became their America." They poured into Syria, infecting, exploiting, assimilating its peoples. With dismay the Jews must have seen themselves surrounded by new Greek colonies, and still more by the old Palestinian cities Hellenized in polity and religion. The Greek translator of Isaiah ix. 12 renders "Philistines" by "Hellenes." The Israelites were compassed and penetrated by influences as subtle as the atmosphere: not as of old uprooted from their fatherland, but with their fatherland itself infected and altered beyond all powers of resistance.

The accession of Antiochus III. Epiphanes (175 B.C.) brought matters to a head. This brilliant madcap aimed at nothing less than the religious unification of his empire, which meant the imposition of the culture of Greece, in its hybrid Syrian forms, upon all his subjects. He adopted energetic measures for the complete eradication of Judaism. By royal decree in October 168 B.C. he ordered all that was distinctive in the religion of the Jews to be removed. It was his will and pleasure that "all should be one people, and that each should forsake his own law" (1 Macc. i. 43). Jerusalem and the Jewish people were to be completely Hellenized. At such a time it was the task of the patriot, and still more of the prophet, to exhort every true

[1] R. L. Ottley, *A Short History of the Hebrews*, 253.

Jew to be loyal to the ancient and sacred institutions of his country.

¶ The zeal of the prophets for Yahweh was expressed in this, that they kindled in the breasts of their countrymen the flame of patriotism and revolt. They were patriots in so far as the feeling had taken possession of them that Israel ought to be free. They had felt the bitterness of the foreign yoke, and had set themselves to stimulate resistance and prepare for a revolt. And this patriotism could not be other than religious, for it is especially true of Israel that the religious and the national were inseparably associated. The programme of the early prophets probably expressed two convictions, that Israel should be free, and that more zeal should be shown in the worship of Yahweh. Apparently the older seers attached themselves to the prophets. They would bring the light of cooler reason, and would catch the glow of enthusiasm and the patriotic interest in the fortunes of Israel, rather than in the more personal and professional subjects that had hitherto engaged their attention.[1]

3. In the first chapter of the Book of Daniel the story is told of four princely Jewish boys at the court of Nebuchadnezzar, who lived on a vegetable diet rather than defile themselves with king's dainties. The word translated "pulse" denotes vegetable food in general; there is no reason for restricting it to leguminous fruits, such as beans and peas, which is what the term "pulse" properly denotes. Since the institution of Levitism after the return from the Exile, the eating of heathen meats had come to be regarded as a deadly sin. To the Christian, who knows that the Kingdom of God is not meat and drink, it seems a needless scruple to taboo any kind of wholesome food. Jesus taught, to the astonishment of the Pharisees and even of His disciples, that it is not what enters into a man that makes him unclean, but the unclean thoughts that come from the heart. So long, however, as the laws of ceremonial purity were an integral part of the religion of the Jews, they could not be treated with indifference. It was the part of a loyal Jew to prove his fidelity to his conscience by rigid adherence to the laws of Moses, which he believed to be the laws of God. Only by so doing could he walk in the light and assure himself of the favour of Heaven.

[1] A. S. Peake, *The Religion of Israel*, 42.

¶ What is conscience? Have we misnamed it when we call it a Divine inward monitor and judge? Is there then, after all, no infallible guide for our life? The modern answer on these points represents a broader outlook than the older one; yet, properly considered, it is not one whit less spiritual or religious. Conscience in this view is the correspondence of our individual feeling with a common outside standard. But this standard is continually rising and its upward progress is nothing less than the growing revelation of God in and to our race. The Divine inspiration was assuredly in the patriarchs, though their manner of life if practised here would have consigned them to a gaol within a week. The explanation is that while the force working in them was from above, its uplift could, in the nature of things, carry them only as far as it was in their generation to go. There *is* an immutable standard of right and wrong, but it was not plumped into the world all at once. It is dawning upon us bit by bit in the ceaseless development of the human spirit. Conscience *is* the Divine in us, but like another incarnation, it was born a babe and comes to itself by degrees, "increasing in wisdom and stature."[1]

ii. The Philosophy of History.

The author of Daniel is the first inspired writer who has a distinct philosophy of history. He believes that the God of heaven changes seasons and times, removes kings and sets up kings, and that no king, or king of kings, can have any power and strength and glory unless these are given to him from above. And he believes that, while the God of heaven bestows temporary dominion upon one Gentile dynasty after another, His purpose is to set up in the end a kingdom which shall never be destroyed. These thoughts find expression in the weird idea of an image, of surpassing brightness and terrible in form, whose various parts are of gold, silver, brass, iron, and clay, and which is struck by a stone cut out without human hands, beaten to chaff, and whirled away by the wind, while the stone which smites it becomes a great mountain and fills the earth.

All are agreed that by the mysterious rock-fragment the writer meant the Messianic Kingdom. The "mountain" out of which (as is here first mentioned) the stone is cut is "the Mount Zion." It begins "in the days of these kings." Its origin is not earthly, for it is "cut without hands." It represents "a kingdom"

[1] J. Brierley.

which "shall be set up by the God of heaven," and shall destroy and supersede all the kingdoms, and shall stand for ever.

Whether a personal Messiah was definitely prominent in the mind of the writer is a question which will come before us later. Here there is only a Divine Kingdom; and that this is the dominion of Israel seems to be marked by the expression, "the kingdom shall not be left to other people."

¶ Dante has made an impressive use of Daniel's image. Having repeated the seer's description of the colossus which symbolizes the successive earthly empires, he adds his own sad reflection. "Every part, except the gold, is broken with a fissure that drops tears, which collected perforate that grotto. Their course descends from rock to rock into this valley. They form Acheron, Styx, and Phlegethon; then, by this narrow conduit, go down to where there is no more descent."[1]

iii. The Great King.

All Jewish writers seem to have clearly realized that "truth in closest words shall fail, when truth embodied in a tale shall enter in at lowly doors." They convey their ideas to the reader's mind by concrete illustration rather than in the categories of abstract thought. In the stories of Daniel the doctrine is everything. To make the story the first consideration, and the doctrine it was intended to convey an after-thought, as we, with our dry Western literalness are predisposed to do, is to reverse the Jewish order of thinking, and to inflict unconscious injustice on the authors of many edifying narratives of antiquity.

1. The character of Nebuchadnezzar was not known to the writer of Daniel as he has been revealed to us by the monuments. Far from setting up an image of himself in gold and commanding everybody to fall down and worship it, he was, judged by the standard of his age and country, pre-eminently a *religious* king. As Professor Hommel says, "In his inscriptions we see on the one hand the fatherly care of a prince zealously considerate for the welfare of his land, on the other a genuine and heart-felt piety, which does not at all produce the impression of consisting simply of empty phrases." His longer inscriptions invariably begin with

[1] J. A. Carlyle, *Dante's Inferno*, 166.

an acknowledgment of what he owes to Marduk and Nebo, and end with a prayer for further blessings.

He is known chiefly as a builder, and in the famous "India House Inscription" he tells how he renovated two great temples and built many others, while of one of his splendid palaces he says, "That house, for admiration I made it, for the beholding of the hosts of men I filled it with magnificence. Awe-inspiring glory, and dread of the splendour of my sovereignty, encompass it round about; the evil, unrighteous man cometh not within it." And he ends with a prayer to Marduk, his "lord," beseeching him, as he loves and has adorned his abode, to grant him long and prosperous life in the palace which he has built, and to permit his descendants to rule in it for ever.

2. But when the writer of Daniel depicted the great king of Babylon, he had in his mind the king who was so well known to him and all his countrymen—Antiochus Epiphanes, the Manifest (god), a title which his subjects changed into Antiochus Epimanes, the Mad. This king undoubtedly deified himself. This is particularly evident on his coins. His best portraits appear to be those on the coins of his early years, which bear simply the inscription "King Antiochus." At a later period of his reign a star appears on his forehead, implying that he has assumed divine honours. Then in coins with the legend, "King Antiochus, God" (or "God Manifest" [Epiphanes]), the star disappears, but the portrait is idealized, the features approximating in type to those of Apollo. Other coins of the same type exhibit the head surrounded by a diadem with rays—another mark of divine rank. Lastly, on coins with the legend "King Antiochus, God Manifest, Victory-bearer," the head approximates even to that of Zeus Olympios, whose distinctive epithet "Victory-bearer" the king himself assumes. His sin was arrogant and impious self-confidence—that *hubris* which the Greeks regarded as a high offence against heaven, and which was always overtaken sooner or later by some dire Nemesis; that pride which, according to the Hebrew sages, goes before destruction, that haughty spirit which is sure to end in a fall.

¶ Pride seeks to lower others, because it seeks to raise self. The wish to exalt self leads to the wish to see one's neighbour humbled. The presence of pride discloses itself in subtle and

unexpected ways. Why do we take pleasure in our neighbour's misfortunes? Is not the strange sensation of satisfaction which we feel the pulse of our unsubdued pride? This uncanny but pleasing thrill is the wicked chuckle of our pride. On this platform stands La Rochefoucauld's cynical saying: "We have all enough patience to bear our neighbour's misfortunes." "Pride," as Thomas Aquinas writes, "is said to be the love of our own excellence, in so far that out of love arises an overweening presumption of our right to overtop others, which fitly belongs to pride."[1]

3. The story of the stricken despot of mighty Babylon is illustrated again and again by what the late Bishop Thirlwall called the "irony of history"—the very cases in which men seem to have been elevated to the very summit of power only to heighten the dreadful precipice over which they immediately fall. He mentions the cases of Persia, which was on the verge of ruin when with lordly arrogance she dictated the Peace of Antalcidas; of Boniface VIII., in the Jubilee of 1300, immediately preceding his deadly overthrow; of Spain, under Philip II., struck down by the ruin of the Armada at the zenith of her wealth and pride. He might have added the instances of Ahab, Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, and Herod Antipas; of Alexander the Great, dying as the fool dieth, drunken and miserable, in the supreme hour of his conquests; of Napoleon, hurled into the dust, first by the retreat from Moscow, then by the overthrow at Waterloo. But the writer of Daniel, having a great soul, and bearing no malice even to a proud despot, makes his demented and fallen monarch come to himself again, repent of his sins, and bless and praise the King of Heaven who is able to abase those that walk in pride.

¶ Longfellow tells how King Robert of Sicily, hearing the words chanted, "He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree," muttered scornfully,

> 'Tis well that such seditious words are sung
> Only by priests and in the Latin tongue;
> For unto priests and people be it known,
> There is no power can push me from my throne!

As a punishment he was made to feel that the world he loved

[1] W. Boyd Carpenter, *The Spiritual Message of Dante*, 151.

so much had turned to dust and ashes. Three years of abject poverty taught him the lesson of humility, and with both hands crossed upon his breast he meekly said:

> My sins as scarlet are; let me go hence,
> And in some cloister's school of penitence,
> Across those stones, that pave the way to heaven,
> Walk barefoot, till my guilty soul be shriven.

And then, restored to royal power and glory, he learned for the first time the meaning of the words, "He hath exalted them of low degree."

¶ Nebuchadnezzar never, that I have read of, got one single lesson from God or man that he did not instantly lay it to heart. As I read of Nebuchadnezzar's humility, and makeableness, and teachableness in Daniel's hands I am amazed at the boldness of the young Belteshazzar, and still more at the behaviour of his mighty master. When I put myself into Nebuchadnezzar's place, when I recall my own temper and my own conduct, I honour Nebuchadnezzar, and I cannot cease from wondering that the king of Babylon has not been far more made of as a pattern of humility and meekness both under the dispensations of God and under the doctrines of Daniel.[1]

iv. The Writing on the Wall.

The author of Daniel, in his story of the writing upon the wall, proves himself almost a modern psychologist by his wonderful insight into the workings of the human mind and conscience. When he tells how Belshazzar, flushed with wine and inflated with pride, gave impious orders to insult the God of Israel by using the sacred vessels of the Jewish Temple in a riotous banquet, he was doubtless thinking of the profane and half-mad monarch of his own day, who "entered presumptuously into the sanctuary, and took the golden altar, and the candlestick of the light, and all that pertained thereto, and the table of the shewbread, and the cups to pour withal, and the bowls, and the golden censers, and the veil, and the crowns, and the adorning of gold which was on the face of the temple, and he scaled it all off. And he took the silver and the gold and the precious vessels; and he took the hidden treasures which he found" (1 Macc. i. 21–23).

[1] A. Whyte.

The thought of the profanation of the holy vessels filled the *Hasidim* with an indignation and horror which created the assurance that God *must* interpose to punish such a reckless and insolent blasphemy. The calm and lofty words of the prophet Daniel, sounding in the ears of the flushed banqueters upon whom a silence as of death had suddenly fallen, were like the voice of personified Justice, who holds in one hand a pair of scales and in the other a glittering sword. Men great and small know in their conscience that there is a writing on the wall for them, that they must be weighed in the balance, and that if they are found wanting the sword will do its work. "In that night Belshazzar the Chaldæan king was slain."

Belshazzar's grave is made,
His kingdom pass'd away,
He, in the balance weigh'd,
Is light and worthless clay;
The shroud his robe of state,
His canopy the stone;
The Mede is at his gate!
The Persian on his throne![1]

¶ "The Lord is a God of knowledge," says a solemn Scripture, "and by him actions are weighed." That is to say, you will be weighed in those scales of God by means of which He gets at the very heart's blood of all your actions. Till He has got at the very heart's blood, till He has got at the thoughts and intents of an action, at its most secret motive, He is not yet a God of knowledge. But after that He is. You deceive us, you and your actions both pass with us for what at your heart you are not. But God is not mocked. He knows your exact weight and worth; and the exact weight and worth of all your words and all your deeds. He knows down to the bottom why you did this; and down to the bottom why you did not do that. He has known it all the time, only He has numbered your kingdom, and He lets you go on, deceiving and being deceived, till the Persian is at your gate.[2]

For I am 'ware it is the seed of act
God holds appraising in His hollow palm,
Not act grown great thence in the world below—
Leafage and branchage vulgar eyes admire.

[1] Byron, *Hebrew Melodies.* [2] A. Whyte.

v. The Kingdom of God.

1. In the figurative language of the Apocalyptists, of whom the writers of Daniel and of the Revelation are the greatest, a striking part is played by the conception of wild beasts as the symbols of empire. Their language is often grotesque and incongruous. Utterly lacking in a knowledge of technique, hardly venturing to look at a Greek god or goddess, deficient in the very elements of art, the Jew painted his word pictures as he had seen the uncouth monsters of Egypt and Assyria. His symbols became strange creatures with eagles' wings and lions' bodies, legs of brass, and feet of clay. Unity was as lacking in the composition of his pictures as in their units. Bulls and buffaloes and sheep and goats and birds and shepherds jostled each other in his visions, and the fixed order of nature was unhesitatingly reversed.

But the lessons conveyed by this naïve symbolism are often profound. The author of Daniel is not a careful student of history, and his knowledge is not seldom defective. But in his comparison of the kingdoms—or, as we should say, the empires—of this world to wild beasts, he indicates not only his sense of their terrible power, but also his righteous scorn of the hateful principle that might is right. The lion with four eagles' wings, the bear with three ribs between its teeth, the leopard with four wings and four heads, and the nameless monster with devouring teeth of iron and feet that stamp and crush, had their counterparts in the history of the ancient Orient. The little horn which had eyes and a mouth speaking great things was known to every brave and faithful Maccabean. And the purpose of the author of Daniel is to impress upon the minds of his downtrodden and persecuted countrymen the truth that all power belongs to the Most High, who had hitherto delegated it to one empire after another, and permitted His own people to suffer, but who was now about to give the dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, to His saints. And His Kingdom would be an everlasting Kingdom; all dominions will serve and obey Him.

¶ Writing to his friend J. M. Ludlow, one of the founders of the Christian Socialist movement, Maurice says: "The Kingdom of Heaven is to me the great practical existing reality which is to renew the earth and make it a habitation for blessed spirits instead

of for demons. To preach the Gospel of that Kingdom, the fact that it is among us, and is not to be set up at all, is my calling and business. Because I have preached it so uncertainly—like one beating the air—I have had an easy, quiet life; far too much of the good opinion of my friends; merely a few lumps of not hard mud from those who, now and then, suspect that I have hold of something which might make me their mischievous enemy. But if ever I do any good work, and earn any of the hatred which the godly in Christ Jesus receive, and have a right to, it must be in the way I have indicated, by proclaiming society and humanity to be divine realities, *as they stand*, not as they may become, and by calling upon the priests, kings, prophets of the world to answer for their sin in having made them unreal by separating them from the living and eternal God who has established them in Christ for His glory."[1]

2. It is announced that this Kingdom will be inaugurated by one who comes with the clouds of heaven and who is like a son of man. As the former kingdoms are earthly and bestial, the eternal Kingdom of the saints is at once purely celestial and perfectly human and humane. The rendering of A.V., "the Son of man," is quite untenable; the expression of the original is indefinite, and denotes simply, in poetical language, a figure in human form. What the figure is intended to represent can be properly determined only after the explanation in verse 16 ff. has been considered. If the terms of verses 18, 22*b*, 27 are to be taken as deciding the question, it would seem that it must describe the ideal and glorified people of Israel. The difference between a devouring wild beast and a human being made in God's image is not greater than the difference between the monarchies which are the incarnation of brute violence and a theocracy which is the embodiment of the mind and will of the living and true God. This idea is fully developed in the New Testament revelation.

¶ The beast is the brute in human life, the inhuman, the mere force or power, to which all others are but victims and food, that rends and devours. Whatever we can say of the world, let us make sure that the victory is being won, at least, in our own hearts; that the spirit of the beast—the false thought that ministers to it, and the love of worldly dalliance and delight—is being driven out by the spirit of the Lamb that was slain.[2]

[1] *Life of Frederick Denison Maurice*, ii. 137.
[2] A. B. Davidson, *Waiting upon God*, 377.

3. The Hebrew ideal of nationality is the supremacy of righteousness, the triumph of the saints. Plato desired that the reins of government should be in the hands of philosophers; the Hebrew seer would put them in the hands of the saints. Saint is a word not easy to define, and there is a world of difference between the canonized saints of the Roman calendar and the uncanonized who fought under Judas the Maccabee and Cromwell the Protector, saints with "a two-edged sword in their hand; to execute vengeance upon the nations, and punishments upon the peoples; to bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron, to execute upon them the judgment written" (Ps. cxlix. 6–9). There is always a temptation to abuse power, and even the great Maccabean and the greater Puritan did things of which the Christian conscience cannot approve. But every Christian believes that the eternal Kingdom is the dominion of Him who was called the Son of God.

¶ The precise form of the final judgment and future government of the world we cannot predict; but from this statement [of St. Paul, that the saints shall judge the earth] a bright ray of light shoots into the darkness, and shows us that the saints, *i.e.*, the servants of Christ, are to have the responsibility of pronouncing judgment on character, and of allotting destiny, reward or punishment. We shrink from such a thought; not, indeed, that we are slow to pronounce judgment upon our fellow-men, but to do so officially, and in connexion with definite results, seems a responsibility too heavy for merely human judges to sustain. But why men should not judge men hereafter as they do judge them now, we do not see. If we, in this present world, submit ourselves to those who have knowledge of law and ordinary justice, we may well be content to be judged in the world to come by those whose holiness has been matured by personal strife against evil, by sustained efforts to cleanse their souls from bias, from envy, from haste, from harshness, from all that hinders them from seeing and loving the truth. Holiness, or likeness to God, assimilation to His mind, formed by the constant desire to judge of things in this world as He judges, and to love truly all that He loves, this quality is surely worthy to be at the head. In that future Kingdom of God in which all things are to have their proper place, and are to be ranked according to their real worth, holiness must come to the supremacy.[1]

[1] Marcus Dods, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 113.

vi. The Man of Prayer.

Daniel is brought before the Maccabees as a man of prayer—a man who sets his face unto the Lord God, to apply himself to prayer and supplications, with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. In his prayer he confesses the transgression of his nation, acknowledges the justice of Divine punishment, and supplicates for mercy and restoration. The prayer is composed largely of reminiscences of Deuteronomy, the prayer of Solomon, and the prayers of Jeremiah. But the most striking resemblances are with the confession and supplication of Baruch. No finer prayer could have been put into the hands of a Maccabean warrior during that momentous struggle in which all that was dear and sacred to Israel was at stake.

¶ That Maccabean prayer may be compared with one prepared for a brilliant modern soldier—Lord Roberts—and largely used in two great wars:

"Almighty Father, I have often sinned against Thee. O wash me in the precious blood of the Lamb of God. Fill me with Thy Holy Spirit, that I may lead a new life. Spare me to see again those whom I love at home, or fit me for Thy presence in peace. Strengthen us to quit ourselves like men in our right and just cause. Keep us faithful unto death, calm in danger, patient in suffering, merciful as well as brave; true to our King, our country, and colours. If it be Thy will, enable us to win victory for Britain; but, above all, grant us a better victory over temptation and sin. Thus in life and death may we be more than conquerors through Him who loved us and laid down His life for us, Jesus our Saviour, the Captain of the Army of God. Amen."

¶ The prophet Daniel became a great proficient both in penitential and in intercessory prayer as the years went on. And he came to that great proficiency just as a great proficiency is come to in any other science or art: that is to say, by constant, and unremitting, and enterprising practice. Lord, teach us to pray, said a disciple on one occasion to our Lord. But not even our Lord with all His willingness, and with all His ability, can teach any of us off-hand to pray. Every man must teach himself, every day he lives, this most personal, most secret, and most experimental of all the arts. Every man must find out the best ways of prayer for himself. There is no royal road; there is no short or easy road to proficiency in prayer. It is like all the other arts that you have ever mastered; it must be early begun

and assiduously practised, else you will be but a bungler at it all your days. You must also have special and extraordinary seasons of prayer, as Daniel had, over and above his daily habit of prayer. Special and extraordinary, original and unparalleled seasons of prayer, when you literally do nothing else day nor night but pray. You must pray in your very dreams. Till you will come at last to live, and move, and have your whole being in prayer.[1]

vii. Eternal Life.

1. "I believe in the resurrection of the body." It is an arresting fact that this part of our creed receives the first clear expression on the lips of Daniel, or rather of the anonymous writer who speaks through him (xii. 2, 3). The belief of the ancient Hebrews, like that of the ancient Greeks, was that the human spirit after death descended into the under-world—Sheol or Hades—the house prepared for the shades of all men, good and bad, great and small, where they entered upon a half-conscious, joyless existence, not to be called life, and where their communion with God was for ever at an end. The transcending of this gloomy conception, and the growth of the belief of an eternal life with God, were due less to the reasonings of the intellect than to the intuitions of the heart. It was ultimately incredible that God should fail and forsake those whom He loved.

2. Though the doctrine of an individual immortality emerged in Job and the Psalms, it failed to establish itself permanently in the religious expectations of Israel. Not to a future of individual bliss, even though in the Divine Presence, but to a resurrection to a new life as members of the holy people and citizens of the Messianic Kingdom, did the righteous aspire. The individual thus looked forward to his highest consummation in the life of the righteous community.

The first practical effect of this new doctrine was the awakening and fostering of the martyr spirit. Had the writer of Job lived in the Apocalyptic era, he would have had a new and satisfying solution of the problem of suffering. The belief in the resurrection made men strong to endure and faithful unto death. One of the brother martyrs of the Second Book of Maccabees

[1] A. Whyte.

struck a new note, which has been resounding all down the ages, when he said, "It is good to die at the hands of men and look for the hopes which are given by God, that we shall be raised up again by him" (vii. 14).

¶ The heart sinks and withers beneath the thought that the form so dear to it, so expressive of the light and beautiful soul, should be, must be, the slave of corruption. But this, at least, is a consoling consequence. If *the whole* man has had to pay the penalty of sin, the body in its dissolution, the soul in its disembodiment, Reason herself demands, what Revelation asserts, that *the whole* man should share the victory—the body by a splendid reconstruction, the soul by restoration to its ancient home. God's promise of man's entire beatitude is a pledge that this article of the Christian creed is true. The Church does not trouble herself with any details about particles of matter; about its mysterious onward march in bodies she has nothing to say; but she *does* assert continuous identity, and she has on her side two important teachers —the affections and yearnings of the human heart; and, which is more to the point, Divine Revelation.[1]

¶ To Hegel, mere externality—the mere more or less of matter —was a thing of no importance. To him, Spirit, Thought, was everything; and the external universe was interesting only in so far as, in the laws which govern it, it exhibited thought. As bearing on Stirling's view of the question of immortality, the following brief extract from the *Secret of Hegel* is quoted here:—

"Absurd that you should be continued? Why so? On the contrary, it is no more absurd that you should be continued than that you *are*. That you *are* is the guarantee of your *necessity*. God is a concrete Spirit—not an abstract unit—why should not the death of the body be the birth of Spirit?—and why should not you *continue* united to the universal Spirit then, even as you are so united here, in Natural form, now?"[2]

[1] W. J. Knox Little, *The Mystery of the Passion*, 165.
[2] *James Hutchison Stirling: His Life and Work*, 323.

HOSEA.

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HOSEA.

For I desire mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.—Hos. vi. 6.

I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him.—Hos. xiv. 4.

THE mantle of Amos fell upon the shoulders of Hosea. It is almost impossible to imagine a greater contrast. The one left his own country to deliver a single message of warning and woe to the light-hearted people of the Northern Kingdom; the other spent a life-long ministry in preaching to his disheartened and disorganized compatriots. A remarkable difference is also discernible in the character and message of the two prophets: Amos, the inflexible preacher of righteousness and judgment to come; Hosea, the tender-hearted prophet of outraged love.

1. The pages of Hosea cast a lurid light upon the condition of Israel during the ten or fifteen years which followed the death of Jeroboam. The contemporary of Amos during the later years of Jeroboam II., he also continued to prophesy in the troublous times which began with the overthrow of the house of Jehu. In that age of corruption, conspiracies, and assassinations, when four out of the six successors of Jeroboam died by violence, he made a noble effort to stem the tide of ungodliness. The social evils which Amos denounced had increased rather than abated. Private as well as public honour was lost. Immorality was openly practised unrebuked. The debasing customs of the Canaanite neighbours of the Israelites were eagerly adopted. The hollow ceremonial worship of Jehovah, which had served well enough as a national religion in time of prosperity, broke down under the test of adversity. The nation, which had lost faith in itself and had begun to seek support in foreign alliances, also began to lose faith in the Jehovah whom in its thought it had degraded almost to

the level of a heathen deity. Israel presented the sad example of a nation in the state of moral, political, and religious collapse, while slowly the irresistible and insatiable foe, Assyria, was advancing to crush it. In imagination it is possible to appreciate, in part at least, what must have been the anguish of the inspired poet, patriot, and prophet, who was forced to witness the suicide of his beloved nation. In the light of these facts we understand why the extracts from his sermons, delivered during these tragic days and preserved in chapters iv.–xiv., are impassioned—often obscure—cries, now of denunciation, now of anguish, now of entreaty. Indignation and sorrow, tenderness and severity, faith in the sovereignty of Jehovah's love, and a despairing sense of Israel's infidelity are woven together in a sequence which has no logical plan, but is determined by the battle and alternate victory of contending emotions; and the swift transitions, the fragmentary utterance, the half-developed allusions, that make his prophecy so difficult to the commentator, express the agony of this inward conflict.

2. His ability, notwithstanding conflicting feelings, to give expression to a system of theology which was to serve henceforth as the basis of all Israelite thought, is a factor worthy of consideration in any estimate of his character. He was, in a strange and true sense, a typical Israelite, and his thought, as time shows, was the thought which Israel would accept. This must have come about, at least in part, because his character was fundamentally the Israelite character—strong, complex, emotional, religious.

¶ The whole history of the world to this day is in truth one continual establishing of the Old Testament revelation: "O ye that love the Eternal, see that ye hate the thing that is evil! to him that ordereth his conversation right, shall be shown the salvation of God." And whether we consider this revelation in respect to human affairs at large, or in respect to individual happiness, in either case its importance is so immense, that the people to whom it was given, and whose record is in the Bible, deserve fully to be singled out as the Bible singles them. "Behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the nations; but the Eternal shall arise upon *thee*, and his glory shall be seen upon thee!" For, while other nations had the misleading

idea that this or that, other than righteousness, is saving, and it is not; that this or that, other than conduct, brings happiness, and it does not; Israel had the true idea that *righteousness* is saving, that to *conduct* belongs happiness. . . . As long as the world lasts, all who want to make progress in righteousness will come to Israel for inspiration, as to the people who have had the sense for righteousness most glowing and strongest; and in hearing and reading the words Israel has uttered for us, carers for conduct will find a glow and a force they will find nowhere else.[1]

I.

The Prophet.

1. Hosea is in the Hebrew identical with the original form of the name Joshua, and with the name borne by the last king of Israel (Hoshea). All that is known as to Hosea's personal character and history is based upon the statements in his book. He was the son of an otherwise unknown man, Beeri, and he married a woman, Gomer, whose faithlessness to him was a principal factor in his mission as a prophet. Beyond the incident of his unhappy marriage we possess no further information as to his personal life.

2. That Hosea was a native of the Northern Kingdom needs no proof to any one who has read his book. Without laying any stress on occasional Aramaisms, or on the phrase "our king" in vii. 5, which is probably enough a popular phrase taken up half-satirically by the prophet, it would seem that the flow of sympathy towards the Israelites, the intimate knowledge of their circumstances, the topographical and historical allusions, point unmistakably to one born and bred in the Northern State. His images and turns of expression seem sometimes to be influenced by the Canticles, an exquisite idyll of pure love which originated in the Ten Tribes. His whole soul yearns for his native country with an infinite tenderness.

3. While there is enough in Hosea's book to make us sure that he had seen from the inside the work of the priests, both in con-

[1] Matthew Arnold, *Literature and Dogma.*

nexion with the sacrifices and in connexion with their judicial functions, there is not enough to compel us to suppose that he was professionally identified with them. The prophets were intimately associated with the priesthood—so intimately that there is no need to postulate more for Hosea. Like Amos, he was probably outside the circle of professional prophetism. His attitude towards the official religious guides of the nation is distinctly antagonistic, and his preaching clearly met with much opposition. "As for the prophet," he says, "a fowler's snare is in all his ways, and enmity in the house of his God."

4. It was through his domestic trials that Hosea reached the consciousness of his prophetic calling. Under a Divine impulse, the significance of which he was afterwards to learn, he had married Gomer, who proved herself unworthy of his love. To her three children Hosea gives symbolic names expressive of his message—Jezreel, Lo-ruhamah, Lo-ammi. But his forbearance availed nothing. Attracted perhaps by the licentious orgies of the Canaanite worship, or simply in order to follow a paramour, this profligate woman deserted her husband. At last she sank so low as to be sold for a slave. But in this her lowest degradation her husband did not abandon her. By Divine command he redeemed her from bondage, and brought her home again. There he kept her in a stern seclusion, depriving her of the liberty which she had so wantonly abused, and not yet restoring her to the full rights of a wife, but watching over her, until her affection for him should revive.

¶ There are in the main three interpretations of this story. (1) That it is wholly allegorical. Hosea invents it to describe the infidelity of Israel. But as G. A. Smith says, it "would be strange for Hosea to tell such a record of his wife if false, or, if he was unmarried, about himself." (2) That it is wholly literal. God, indeed, lays heavy burdens upon His servants, but we should require a greater evidence than we have to believe that He demanded that a pure man should take a foul woman to his breast. (3) That the experience is real, but to be interpreted with discretion. The main point is that Gomer was pure, or thought to be pure by Hosea, and fell into wrong after marriage. This view has rapidly gained acceptance since its convinc-

ing presentation by W. Robertson Smith in his *Prophets of Israel*:

"It is a history that lies behind Hosea's public ministry; and we are told that it was through his marriage with Gomer-bath-Diblaim—whose very name shows her to be a real person, not a mere allegory—that Hosea first realized the truths which he was commissioned to preach. The events recorded in chap. i. are not Hosea's first message to Israel, but Jehovah's first lesson to the prophet's soul. God speaks in the events of history and the experiences of human life. He spoke to Amos in the thundering march of the Assyrian, and he spoke to Hosea in the shame that blighted his home."[1]

5. It was a real experience, and the very power of it depends on this, that Hosea's relation to the one unfaithful to him had at its very core and heart an exquisitely noble, genuine, true, human love. Hosea, a man of lofty character, grieved, broken-hearted for the sin of his own time, prays to God, struggling to know God's will, and in the providence of God is led to fall into a pure, sworn, noble love. He dreams of a bright, happy home with a woman to whom his heart goes out, whom he counts true, pure and good, and lovely in return. He loves her, and in his love for her learns to know what sweet human love is. Then a terrible disaster comes upon him: she proves unfaithful, and Hosea comprehends that this guilt that has struck his heart in his own house is but a part of the great pervading pollution of his time. It is that degraded religion, that unfaithfulness to God, that declension of all purity in the land that has broken into his own family circle and has cut his heart till it bleeds. And in all that passes through Hosea's heart he feels the echoes of the great heart of God.

6. Hosea had to learn what no prophet had learned before, and what no prophet ever could have learned by a mechanical revelation from without—that the essence of the Divine nature was not justice but love (cf. 1 John iv. 8). Gomer in her prime of purity was a symbol of Israel whom Jehovah "found as grapes in the wilderness"; in her unnatural infidelity, of Israel who "went after" the Baalim; in her undeserved gradual restitution into the

[1] L. W. Batten, *The Hebrew Prophet*, 87.

position of a wife, of Israel, first led aside into the wilderness, and then taken back to the full favour of an eternally loving God. And Hosea in his mixed and harrowed feelings towards Gomer is himself a type of Jehovah. His loathing abhorrence of her sin, his flaming indignation at her infidelity, and, stronger than either, his tender compassion at the depth of misery to which she has reduced herself, are but a reflection of Jehovah's feelings towards His people. Hosea's work is to give expression to this newly-found truth.

¶ Upon the themes of forgiveness and repentance Hosea has all the essence of the evangel; which indeed quotes his great saying: "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice." Through terrible personal suffering inflicted by one whom he loved, Hosea was led to understand how men's sins cost God more pain than anger. From that moment the Gospel of Divine Forgiveness was assured. And just because she whom the prophet was himself moved to forgive and redeem was an individual, we may believe that, while the nation still continued with Hosea to be the unit of religion, he planted in Israel's faith the seeds which Jeremiah developed of the confidence that God too in forgiveness deals with the single souls of men. Upon Repentance Hosea's teaching is startlingly evangelical. The care with which he follows every symptom of it in his people; the ethical sternness with which he repels their easy optimism regarding it; the labour he takes to distinguish its true character from the sorrow of this world, and founds it on a new knowledge of God and of His love, in short, on a real change of mind—all this anticipates in a wonderful way the Metanoia of the Gospels and Epistles.[1]

II

The Prophecy.

1. Of all the prophetic writings, not one is so difficult as this book. The difficulty lies largely in the style. It is terse, abrupt, full of mixed metaphors, obscure allusions, grammatical anomalies, aggravated no doubt, in many cases, by a corruption of the text, to which they naturally give rise. But the difficulty is also largely increased by the prophet's temperament. "The words of upbraiding, of judgment, of woe, burst out one by one, slowly,

[1] G. A. Smith, *Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament*, 158.

heavily, condensed, abrupt, from the prophet's heavy and shrinking soul." [1]

Hosea has not given us a compact piece of work such as the Book of Amos, for he had not the clear and orderly mind of the elder prophet. The cast of his genius is that of the lyrical poet rather than the orator. Chapters i.–iii. form a distinct work—the First Book of Hosea—complete in itself, and composed before the fall of the Jehuite dynasty. It is a spiritual autobiography—the *confessio amantis* wrung from a heart which, through the anguish of its outraged human love, has won its way to the secret of the love Divine. Chapters iv.–xiv. make up the Second Book of Hosea, manifestly of later date in its contents than the First. This is a continuous and discursive poetical harangue. The conclusion (chap. xiv.) is distinctly marked and beautifully finished; and at different points, especially towards the beginning, we may detect the commencement of new homilies. But no articulated scheme is visible. The whole work is a free, and for the most part unstudied, résumé by the prophet of his preaching in Israel. Forgetting the occasions of time and place, Hosea pours out in full flood the thoughts and emotions that possessed him during the years of his fruitless ministry. The sense of God's love is ever stronger than the sense of His wrath, and the true key to Hosea's meaning often lies in realizing the abruptness with which his feelings succeed each other, like the storms and sunshine of an April day. The man was not so much an intellect; he was a great, overflowing heart. He cannot think out things and reason out things. He sways like a pendulum from one extreme to another: now blazing indignation against the people's wickedness and blindness and madness, and the next moment lamenting over them like a mother over her only son. Emotion is the characteristic of Hosea's writing.

¶ We English are really an emotional nation at heart, easily moved and liking to be moved; we are largely swayed by feeling, and much stirred by anything that is picturesque. But we are strangely ashamed of anything that seems like sentiment; and so far from being bluff and unaffected about it, we are full of the affectation, the pretence of not being swayed by our emotions. We have developed a curious idea of what men and women ought

[1] E. B. Pusey, *The Minor Prophets*, 25.

to be, and one of our pretences is that men should affect not to understand sentiment, and to leave, as we rudely say, "all that sort of thing to the women." Yet we are much at the mercy of clap-trap and mawkish phrases, and we like rhetoric partly because we are too shy to practise it. The result of it is that we believe ourselves to be a frank, outspoken, good-natured race; but we produce an unpleasant effect of stiffness, angularity, discourtesy, and self-centredness upon more genial nations. We defend our bluffness by believing that we hold emotion to be too rare and sacred a quality to be talked about, though I always have a suspicion that if a man says that a subject is too sacred to discuss, he probably also finds it too sacred to think about very much either; yet if one can get a sensible Englishman to talk frankly and unaffectedly about his feelings, it is often surprising to find how delicate they are.[1]

2. Hosea's personal history supplies the master-key to his teaching. Jehovah's faithfulness to Israel and Israel's thankless unfaithfulness to Jehovah are the ideas which permeate and give unity to the whole book. He has no occasion to say, "Thus saith the Lord." Without referring to any past revelation and clothing it in self-chosen words, he feels and knows that the words which well up from his heart adequately express the feelings of the Divine Heart. Gomer in fact is not merely an emblem; she is a representative. As Gomer has erred, so Israel as a nation has erred. Gomer was unchaste and, it would seem, a devotee of Asherah. So were too many others of the women of Israel; while the kindred worship of Baal or Baal-Jehovah absorbed the religious feelings of the men. Hosea, who has learned to "know Jehovah," is cut to the quick by such apostasy; he spares no detail of the abominations that are committed; with a kind of grieved surprise he puts before the people the inevitable punishment; but when he has fully realized the awful nature of the doom, he melts with pity, and recalls the woe. The remainder of the prophecy is entirely devoted to interpreting to Israel its past, and especially its present, history in the light of this new revelation of the love of God.

3. The general thought of Hosea's message is summed up briefly in connexion with a very few propositions: (*a*) Israel is

[1] A. C. Benson, *Joyous Gard*, 77.

wicked through and through, and her condition morally is that of rottenness. (*b*) Israel is politically doomed, the last stages of decay having now been reached. (*c*) Jehovah is Israel's father, with all a father's love and interest; He is Israel's husband, with all a husband's love and devotion. (*d*) Israel fails to comprehend Jehovah; has a totally wrong conception of Him; in short, Israel does not know Jehovah. (*e*) Israel deceives herself in her acts of repentance; but there is a repentance which consists in turning back to Jehovah. (*f*) Israel's present attitude toward Jehovah's love means, in the end, her total destruction.

4. Hosea looks to the very depth of the heart of his country, and sees that it is in a state of corruption which can only end in dissolution. Like Amos, he dwells on the outward and glaring forms of evil; but he probes more deeply than his predecessor into the causes from which they spring, and details more precisely the forms which they assume. Even in the powerful rule of Jeroboam II. he is only able to see a godless militarism, founded upon massacre. But when Jeroboam was dead, and in the ensuing anarchy, when the elemental passions of human nature surged over the petty barriers opposed to them by rival usurpers, he felt more and more that it had become his unhappy lot to be the prophet of the decadence and overthrow of the land he loved. King succeeded king and dynasty dynasty with horrible rapidity. There was no truth, or mercy, or knowledge of God in the land; there was nothing but swearing and lying and killing and stealing and committing adultery, which called for an immediate and ravaging retribution. Page after page of the prophet rings with denunciations of drunkenness, robbery, and whoredom. The noble oppresses the peasant, the money-lender grinds with his cruel usury the poor victim he has got under his clutches, the corn-dealers band together to raise the price of bread in the starving towns, so that the poor are driven to desperation.

Political ruin had also fallen upon the land. Placed there in that position of unsettlement, of exposure to the intrigues of two powerful empires, the people were driven on to ruin by the selfish schemes and disunion of their leaders and rulers, who did not comprehend that a nation's real welfare consists in virtue, in brotherhood, in justice, in mercy, in industry, in well-doing, in

loving union of class with class, in the obedience of all to God above, in faith and heroic aspiration to work out a career on earth worthy of God, who called them to be a nation.

5. The causes of the wide-spread immorality were twofold, as Hosea, resident perhaps in Samaria, saw more clearly and pointed out more definitely than Amos.

(1) The first cause Hosea points out for us in the shape of tremendous denunciation of Israel's prophets and Israel's priests. From Hosea, the earliest of the Northern prophets whose works are extant, to Malachi, the latest prophet of the returned exiles, the priests had very little right to be proud of their title. Their pretensions were, for the most part, in inverse proportion to their merits. The neutrality, or the direct wickedness, of the religious teachers of a country, torpid in callous indifference and stereotyped in false traditions, is always the worst sign of a nation's decadence. Amos had found by experience that for any man who desired a reputation for worldly prudence, the wisest rule was to hold his tongue; but Hosea, for whom there was no escape from his native land, nothing remained but to bear the reproach that "the prophet is a fool, and the spiritual man is mad," uttered by men full of iniquity and hatred. The priests suffered the people to perish for lack of knowledge. They set their hearts on their iniquity and contentedly connived at, if they did not directly foster, the sinfulness of the people, which at any rate secured them an abundance of sin-offerings. And there was worse behind. They were active fomenters of evil; they were as "a snare on Mizpah, and a net spread on Tabor." Two other places—Gilead and Shechem—were rendered infamous by their enormities. Bloody footprints marked the soil, and "as bandits lying in wait, (so doth) the company of priests; they murder on the road towards Shechem; yea, they commit outrages."

¶ Professor Maurice, in a letter dated December 27th, 1865, criticizes one of the most novel aud characteristic positions assumed by Stanley in his second volume of Lectures on the Jewish Church. The Professor, after thanking him for the book, says: "The one subject upon which I have not yielded to your arguments is that of the priesthood. I do not dispute any of

your facts, or their value; I should go further than you go in speaking of the sins of the Jewish priest, and of those who, rightly or wrongly, have borne that name in all countries and all ages. Priests, Jewish and heathen and Christian, it seems to me, have been worse than other men, because they themselves have offered, and have led mankind to offer, sacrifices to Moloch and Ashtaroth—or, in later times, emphatically to the Devil—when they have been appointed to offer them to the Eternal God of Truth and Love. I cannot exempt them from this terrible charge under the plea that they had not the very highest of functions in being witnesses that all creation is God's, or that any mere words of the prophet, grand as they may be, could dispense with the actual offering which the priests, as representatives of their nation or of humanity, were to bring."[1]

(2) But the second cause of the national apostasy lay deeper still—the religious declension and false worship of the people, in its two forms of Baal- or nature-worship, and Jehovah-worship under the figure of a calf or young bull. Hosea's diagnosis of the guilt of Israel is an instance of the penetrating insight granted to a soul made sensitive by keen sorrow. Outwardly, Israel was not faithless to her God. She frequented the sacred festivals, offered the customary sacrifices, performed the traditional ritual; and she did all this as the service of Jehovah. Nevertheless, Hosea charged her with apostasy. The God Hosea knew was a great, spiritual God; a God whose whole being cared supremely for moral things, not for physical things; a God who meant this world to be only a means to an end, to be the platform on which a human drama was to be played, a scaffolding within which a temple of eternal human character of goodness was to be built up, a kingdom of heaven on earth. Hosea's God longed for righteousness, justice, truth, mercy between man and man; for aspirations of unselfishness, of heavenliness in human hearts. Israel's God bore the same name as Hosea's God. Israel's God, worshipped at His shrine, was Jehovah—Jehovah, the old orthodox God of the nation. And Israel had not cancelled one of the old articles of its creed. Israel had not touched one of the laws that came down out of antiquity—laws stamped with the name and backed by the will of Jehovah. But Israel had utterly

[1] R. E. Prothero, *The Life and Correspondence of Arthur Penrhyn Stanley*, ii. 249.

transformed the character of the God it worshipped. The corruption was doubtless growing deeper every year. The God of Israel, through being addressed as Baal, was confounded with the local divinities of the Canaanites, and the moral influence of the old Jehovah-worship was lost. Indeed, the Baal-cultus itself, in which the Jehovah-cultus was now practically merged, was descending in the scale of religions. The Israelites were no longer in the stage of naïve faith, and so could not recognize the old nature-worship in its original significance. They were formalists of the worst kind, because the meaning of their forms had never been a high and elevating one. And besides this, the still grosser form of Baal-cultus introduced by the Tyrian princess Jezebel probably had a baleful effect on the native religion, since its persecuted adherents would become fused with those of the latter, and would bring their gross practices and licentious spirit with them.

The root-sin, from which all others spring, is unfaithfulness to Jehovah. Israel is a harlot and an adulteress. She has broken the marriage vow by religious apostasy. The false gods for which she has deserted Jehovah are her lovers. The Phœnician nature-worship was essentially immoral, and it is not always easy to decide whether Hosea is speaking literally or figuratively. Probably he regarded the abominations connected with the worship of Baal and Ashtoreth as the outward symbol of the spiritual sin, and did not care to distinguish sharply.

¶ Idolatry indeed is wickedness; but it is the thing, not the name, which is so. Real idolatry is to pay that adoration to a creature which is known to be due only to the true God. He who professeth to believe in one Almighty Creator, and in His Son Jesus Christ, and is yet more intent on the honours, profits, and friendships of the world than he is, in singleness of heart, to stand faithful to the Christian religion, is in the channel of idolatry; while the Gentile, who, notwithstanding some mistaken opinions, is established in the true principle of virtue, and humbly adores an Almighty Power, may be of the number that fear God and work righteousness.[1]

6. The separation of the Northern Kingdom from Judah comes in for blame from the prophet also. Israel's rebellion and defec-

[1] John Woolman, *Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes* (*Journal*, 52).

tion from the house of David, truly considered, was defection from Jehovah also. This is its primary offence, and the root of all other offences. Hence in their regeneration they shall undo their past rebellion, "and seek Jehovah their God, and David their king."

For these sins judgment is close at hand. Samaria must bear the punishment of her guilt. The kingdom of Ephraim must be destroyed. But even while He pronounces sentence, Jehovah's compassion is moved. He yearns over the guilty nation with the tenderest affection. "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me, my compassions are kindled together."

¶ When I survey the occurrences of my life, and call into account the finger of God, I can perceive nothing but an abyss and mass of mercies, either in general to mankind, or in particular to myself. And, whether out of the prejudice of my affection, or an inverting and partial conceit of His mercies, I know not,—but those which others term crosses, afflictions, judgments, misfortunes, to me, who inquire further into them than their visible effects, they both appear, and in event have ever proved, the secret and dissembled favours of His affection. It is a singular piece of wisdom to apprehend truly, and without passion, the works of God, and so well to distinguish His justice from His mercy as not to miscall those noble attributes; yet it is likewise an honest piece of logick so to dispute and argue the proceedings of God as to distinguish even His judgments into mercies. For God is merciful unto all, because better to the worst than the best deserve; and to say He punisheth none in this world, though it be a paradox, is no absurdity.[1]

7. But the most touching and beautiful picture of the restoration is in the dialogue between the penitent people and Jehovah with which the book closes. They approach Him with a prayer for pardon, confessing their sin and promising no more to turn for help to worldly powers or material forces, no more to worship the work of their hands. Very gracious is the answer: "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him."

Thus the commanding thought in Hosea is the love of God to

[1] Sir Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici.*

the children of Israel. In love He redeemed them from Egypt; His relations to them, all through their history, have been those of love; even His chastisements have been inflicted in love; and, finally, their restoration and everlasting peace shall come about through Jehovah's love. This relation of love Hosea expresses by calling Jehovah the Father, and especially the Husband, of Israel. The idea of the latter relation runs through the whole prophecy, and is the more fertile idea of the two; or, at least, is truer to the primary conception of the Old Testament religion, which is that of a covenant, and not that of generation by Jehovah; although the latter idea, really the more profound, is touched upon by Hosea, and more fully developed by later prophets. Throughout the prophets, who are statesmen in the Kingdom of God, the person or subject with whom Jehovah enters into relations is always the community of Israel. All human relationships within the Israelite community are rooted in the primal love of Jehovah to Israel. Hosea learned this truth in the school of Providence, and he implies it in all his moral teaching. It is this primal love, however, that fills the foreground of Hosea's prophecies. His highest aim is to set forth its moral nature, as opposed to the altogether non-moral and quasi-physical union supposed to exist between a heathen deity and his worshippers. Jehovah is not more loving than righteous. His union with His people may be, must be, indestructible, but this is because "love is strong as death," and therefore must be able to command a response of love in its own object. The Israelites must one day feel a love to Jehovah which is not merely as a "morning-cloud," and Hosea exhausts the resources of his art in picturing this delightful future. The sin of individuals cannot hinder Jehovah's mercy to the nation; only if the actual nation persists in forsaking His law, it will have to pass through a very hurricane of cleansing judgment.

How truly, and how beautifully, does the teaching of Hosea supplement and complete the sterner doctrine of Amos. Amos confines himself to that eternal truth which is the very foundation of a religious character—that God is righteous, and must have righteousness in His worshippers. He lays bare, with unsparing hand, the hollowness and shams of a religion which thinks to satisfy God with outward forms of worship, while it is all the

time transgressing the first principles of morality. He witnesses to one side of the character of God. Hosea, with a deeper insight, a keener sympathy, a tenderer heart, supplies the motive power of religion and of life when he draws back the veil which hides the face of God and reveals that truth which is the very life-blood of our Christianity to-day, that "the Heart of the Eternal is most wonderfully kind."

¶ In an introduction written for Professor Gerhart's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Schaff expresses himself clearly upon the Divine love as revealed in Christ as the starting-point of theology. "Every age," he says, "must produce its own theology. What do we know about decrees passed millions of years ago in the hidden depths of eternity? Can we conceive God as deliberately discussing with Himself a plan of constructing a world, and finally coming to a conclusion and making out a programme? Is this not subjecting the infinite and eternal Being to the limitations of time and the conditions of a logical process of ratiocination? But we do know the historical manifestations of God in Christ. We do know the God of the Gospels and the Epistles; and the God whom Christ has revealed to the world is a God of saving love. There is no greater word in the whole Bible than the sentence 'God is love,' and the other which is like unto it, 'God so loved the world (that is, all mankind,) that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life.' Shall we substitute for this, 'God is a sovereign'? 'God loved the elect,' and the elect only? . . . God's love is universal in its aim, and intent and abundant in its provision for the salvation of every human soul made in the image of God and redeemed by the blood of Christ. If any one is lost, he is lost by his own unbelief, not by an eternal decree of reprobation or an act of preterition, or any lack of intention or provision on the part of God. . . . The theology of the future will be the theology of love. Such a theology will give new life to the church, and prepare the way for the reunion of Christendom."[1]

[1] *The Life of Philip Schaff*, 477.

JOEL.

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JOEL.

This is that which hath been spoken by the prophet Joel;
And it shall be in the last days, saith God,
I will pour forth of my Spirit upon all flesh:
And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
And your young men shall see visions,
And your old men shall dream dreams.—Acts ii. 16, 17.

It is difficult to trace the process by which it came about, but there can be no doubt that the hopes of later Judaism are of a narrower and more nationalistic cast than those of the Exilic period. In fact, as Professor Pfleiderer remarks, in some respects "the legal religion of the synagogue shows a retrogression from the lofty idealism of the prophets." The universalist hopes of the later Isaiah fall into the background, and give way before the ambitions of Jewish particularism. The spirit of rigid exclusiveness fostered by the Levitical Law displayed itself in an attitude of hatred and contempt towards the heathen world. Cornill observes that the stage was a necessary one in Israel's development, for the life and death struggle with Hellenism was yet to come. The observance of the Law, which sharply separated Israel from the heathen world, formed a kind of defensive armour, which the polished shafts of paganism could neither break nor penetrate. Judaism was a hard shell under which the kernel of true religion was preserved and transmitted unimpaired. Nevertheless, the effect of this period on prophecy was not altogether happy.

The Book of Joel seems to represent the temper of the new Judaism. Its tone is strongly nationalistic; it regards the heathen as objects only of vengeance, not of grace; it reflects the confidence of the Jew that Israel is a righteous people and the object of a Divine favour which is sufficiently secured by the care bestowed on the Temple cultus. In fact, it has been thought, though the point is necessarily uncertain, that in the Book of Joel

we pass from the older type of prophecy to the class of Apocalyptic literature, which has peculiarities and merits of its own, but cannot be fairly judged by the same standard as earlier prophetic writings. While prophecy is the mature fruit of ancient Israel's religion, apocalyptic writings are the characteristic product of Judaism. They bear witness, like the belief in the *Bath Qôl*, to the consciousness that Jehovah had ceased to speak immediately to His people.

I.

The Prophet.

1. Nothing is known of Joel outside his book. He was the son of Pethuel, or Bethuel, who is otherwise unknown. His name contains a confession of faith, "Jehovah is God!" and may reflect the piety of his parents. But there is not the challenge in the historical situation that there is in the similar name Elijah, "My God is Jehovah!" For there is no trace that the people of his day were idolaters, and our prophet was not the first bearer of this rather frequent name.

2. Joel's prophecy is concerned wholly with Judah; and that his home was in this country may be inferred with confidence from the terms in which he speaks repeatedly of "Zion," "the children of Zion," "Judah and Jerusalem," "the children of Judah," "the children of Jerusalem," and from the familiarity which he displays with the Temple and the ministrations of the priests.

A tradition says that he belonged to the tribe of Reuben, but his book argues against it. According to the whole impression it makes, Joel was a Judæan, for his interest is exclusively in Judah. Whether his home was in Jerusalem or in the immediate vicinity, we do not know. It has been surmised that he was a Jerusalem priest, but this cannot be proved from his profound interest in the Temple, priests and ritual, for he does not include himself among the priests.

3. The date of The Book of Joel is disputed, as many of its allusions are consistent with more than one period. The omission of all mention of Assyria and Babylon points to its having been

produced either before the rise of the former (*i.e.*, early in the 8th century), or after the downfall of the latter (*i.e.*, in the 5th century); and each of these alternatives will account for certain features in the book.

But whilst the omission amongst Judah's enemies of the Ammonites (who were especially troublesome in the 5th century, see Neh. iv. 7) is in favour of the earlier date (though Amos in the 8th century denounced them, i. 13–14), yet the absence of any mention of Syria, the allusions to Egypt and Greece (iii. 19, 6), and, finally, the description of Israel as *scattered among the nations* (iii. 2), give a preponderant probability to the post-Exilic date. The prophet makes no allusion to Northern Israel; the people of God is Israel which dwells in Jerusalem. If the kingdom of the North had existed in Joel's day we should have expected allusions to it, as in all the prophets who are known to be early. Further, the prophet makes no reference to the conflict between the true, spiritual worship of Jehovah and false worship; he mentions neither Baal, nor high places, nor idols, the work of men's hands, although this conflict is just what fills the pages of all the earlier prophets from Amos to Jeremiah. It would appear that in his day the opposition to the worship of Jehovah alone had been overcome in Judah. The prophet signalizes no great sins, such as idolatry, on the people's part; they are sinful and need repentance; above all, there is need of the outpouring of the Spirit of God, but the grosser sins attacked by earlier prophets do not seem to have been prevalent. It is doubtful if such a state of things existed at any time prior to the restoration from exile. On the whole we may fix the book between 444 B.C., the establishment of the Law under Ezra and Nehemiah, and 360 B.C., when the Persian government began to persecute the Jews.

4. The prophecy of Joel is of a different order from those we have found in the earlier books; the writer is rather a poet than a prophet; he addresses a small community, and the Temple is the centre of his world and the supreme object of his sympathy. Joel was evidently, according to his capacity, a man of noble spirit who had studied the earlier writings and who gladly places his literary gifts at the service of the Church. In his writings we seem to reach a point where the prophet is beginning to give way to the

theologian and the scribe. His carefully prepared sermon has a real significance, as a revelation of his faith, and as a document of that Jewish Church which was now reaching its final stage of development. The small Jewish community, sheltered within the large frame-work of the Persian Empire, was free to devote itself exclusively to religious and ecclesiastical interests; its circumstances might be miserable, and its noblest life drawn largely from the past, but in these dull, prosaic days it was preserving a great treasure for the world and preparing for another heroic struggle. Before the Exile the prophet is a critic of the Church, afterwards he becomes a comforter of a struggling community; in Joel he appears as a churchman who devotes his patriotic fervour and prophetic fire to keep alive the flame of sacrifice upon the altar. In this position also real inspiration is possible, and a man of true prophetic spirit may catch the command, "Strengthen the things that remain, which are ready to die." And yet it is worth while noting where the particular prophet places his emphasis, and the kind of dress that he considers appropriate for the clothing of his thoughts concerning God and the world. We have here, then, the poetic picture of a great calamity, the prophet's persuasive call to national penitence, the promise of acceptance and blessing which expands into a programme of final judgment.

¶ Joel was no great thinker and no great prophet. But he was a poet, and a poet of no mean order. His style is clear, fluent and beautiful. The lyrical quality of some of his lines places them among the best of their kind in the Old Testament, while his graphic, terse descriptions are exceedingly effective. He varies the rhythmic movement of his sentences with his changing thought and mood. This gives to his addresses a beautiful harmony of form and content. We do not wonder that the people listened to him as the sweet, plaintive cadences of his beautiful lines or the swift, galloping staccato utterances of his unforgettable descriptions or of his stirring appeals fell on their ears. Nor do we wonder that they obeyed his command, voicing as it did their own feelings. He knew himself to be one of them, their spokesman, but also the spokesman of God.[1]

[1] J. A. Bewer

II.

His Prophecy.

1. The prophecy springs out of the circumstances of the time. Its central thought is the idea of the Day of Jehovah, which is suggested to the prophet by the drought and the visitation of locusts from which at the time the land of Judah was suffering. Joel sees in the locusts more than a mere swarm of insects, however vast: they are Jehovah's army (ii. 11, 25); He is at their head; they come to perform the mission which He has entrusted to them (ii. 11). But repentance may avert the judgment; and this accordingly is the duty which the prophet earnestly impresses upon his countrymen. They respond to his exhortations; and he is accordingly commissioned to announce the removal of the plague. To this announcement Joel, in the manner of the prophets, attaches promises of the material and spiritual felicity to be enjoyed by the people afterwards; and further takes occasion to draw an *ideal* picture of the day of Israel's justification, and the destruction of the powers hostile to it.

2. Two matters require special attention in the prophecy of Joel, one the reality of the visitation of locusts, the other the condition attaching to the prophecy.

(1) Many interpreters, both ancient and modern, have taken the locusts as figurative and allegorical. But, after allowing for a certain amount of hyperbole, which is always more or less present in poetic description, and for Eastern rhetoric, there is nothing to suggest that throughout a literal plague of locusts is not intended. It is difficult to conceive any writer comparing the swarms of locusts pictured by the prophet to an army of soldiers if these locusts were already the figure of an invading host. Nor could he well speak of an enemy entering a beleaguered city like a thief. There is, however, no reference to any desolation wrought by a human foe, and the promise "to restore the years that the locust hath eaten" certainly suggests that throughout the ravages have been caused by a real swarm of locusts. At the same time it is fairly evident that it is made the basis of a prediction of some other great catastrophe; *e.g.*, in the destruction of the locust

army Joel sees a type of hostile nations repelled; in the return of the rain, a symbol of the outpouring of the Spirit (ii. 28); and in the temporal blessings bestowed, not only a witness to Jehovah's loving mercy towards His people but also a pledge that He will continue to abide with them.

¶ If we ourselves had lived through such a plague, we should be able to recognize how little licence the poet has taken, and that the seer, so far from unduly mixing with his facts the colours of Apocalypse, must have experienced in the terrible plague itself enough to provoke all the religious and monitory use which he makes of it.

The present writer has seen but one swarm of locusts, in which, though it was small and soon swept away by the wind, he felt not only many of the features that Joel describes, but even some degree of that singular helplessness before a calamity of portent far beyond itself, something of that supernatural edge and accent, which, by the confession of so many observers, characterize the locust-plague and the earthquake above all other physical disasters. One summer afternoon, upon the plain of Hauran, a long bank of mist grew rapidly from the western horizon. The day was dull, and as the mist rose athwart the sunbeams, struggling through clouds, it gleamed cold and white, like the front of a distant snow-storm. When it came near, it seemed to be more than a mile broad, and was dense enough to turn the atmosphere raw and dirty, with a chill as of a summer sea-fog, only that this was not due to any fall in the temperature. Nor was there the silence of a mist. We were enveloped by a noise, less like the whirring of wings than the rattle of hail or the crackling of bush on fire. Myriads upon myriads of locusts were about us, covering the ground, and shutting out the view in all directions. Though they drifted before the wind, there was no confusion in their ranks. They sailed in unbroken lines, sometimes straight, sometimes wavy; and when they passed pushing through our caravan, they left almost no stragglers, except from the last battalion, and only the few dead which we had caught in our hands. After several minutes they were again but a lustre on the air, and so melted away into some heavy clouds in the east.[1]

¶ Joel compares the locusts to horses; and to this day the same metaphor is familiar in every Arab camp. One of my Arabs gave me a long list of reasons why the locust is like the horse or horseman. They were very ingenious, and often amusing; but,

[1] G. A. Smith, *The Book of the Twelve Prophets*, ii. 398.

probably because he himself belonged to a tribe of notorious free-booters, he did not add the most forcible point of resemblance—their sudden appearance in the cultivated lands like a Bedouin raid, their sweeping advance and the desolation which marks their track. Their straight onward march was one of his points of similarity.

Of this we had a striking instance. On arriving at the banks of the Jordan, the swarms, then in a larva or wingless state, marched steadily up the trees which fringe the river. These they denuded of every strip of foliage, and even of the tender bark, not sparing even the resinous tamarisk. As they had stripped the twigs they crept onward, pushed by the hordes behind, and fell by myriads into the rapid stream.

As in the visitation of Egypt, so now it is found that the only means of deliverance from the plague is when a strong wind drives them into the sea; and even then, as mentioned by Joel, their dead bodies taint the air and induce pestilence. In their resistless march, which is without leaders, but all by a common impulse ("the locusts have no king") they climb walls, enter houses by doors or windows, just as they did in the Egyptian plague, and as they are described by Joel, and even gnaw the woodwork of the rooms.[1]

¶ It is a strange sight, beautiful if you can forget the destruction it brings with it. The whole air, to twelve or even eighteen feet above the ground, is filled with the insects, reddish brown in body, with bright, gauzy wings. When the sun's rays catch them it is like the sea sparkling with light. When you see them against a cloud they are like the dense flakes of a driving snow-storm. You feel as if you had never before realized immensity in number. Vast crowds of men gathered at a festival, countless tree-tops rising along the slope of a forest ridge, the chimneys of London houses from the top of St. Paul's—all are as nothing to the myriads of insects that blot out the sun above and cover the ground beneath and fill the air whichever way one looks. The breeze carries them swiftly past, but they come on in fresh clouds, a host of which there is no end, each of them a harmless creature which you can catch and crush in your hand, but appalling in their power of collective devastation.[2]

(2) It is the law of Old Testament prophecy that prophecy is to be understood as conditional, unless it is expressly stated to be absolute. There is a fine remark made by Jerome: "It

[1] H. B. Tristram, *The Natural History of the Bible* (ed. 1911), 314.

[2] J. Bryce, *Impressions of South Africa*, 229.

does not follow, because a prophet has foretold a calamity, that therefore that calamity shall come to pass; for God's prophets do not foretell calamity in order that it may come to pass, but in order that God may be able to withhold it." That is the gospel conception of prophecy. The people are penitent. Instantly Joel declares to them that God's attitude to them is altered; and when they do repent, the first thing promised them is a superabundance of earthly and material prosperity.

There are men who say that this is a degrading thing in Joel's prophecy, and they make a similar charge in regard to other parts of the Old Testament. Degrading? Not a bit of it. Rather it is a fine thing that those Old Testament prophets did believe, with a tremendous conviction, that all earthly mercies come from the love of God. This is the doctrine we need to have preached if we really desire to have the love of God in our religion, in our real life, and not in unreal life, *i.e.*, life artificially put on when we get into an ecclesiastical building. Prosperity is to be sought after as a good; but the prosperity that is a good must come to a man in the line of the will of God, and that is only another way of saying that it must come from God.

¶ My Father and his Brothers, already Master-masons, established themselves in Ecclefechan. They all henceforth began to take on a civic existence, to "accumulate" in all senses; to grow. They were among the best and truest men of their craft (perhaps the very best) in that whole district; and recompensed accordingly. Their gains, the honest wages of Industry, their savings were slow but constant; and in my Father's case continued (from one source or other) to the end. He was born and brought up the poorest; by his own right hand he had become wealthy, as he accounted wealth, and in all ways plentifully supplied. His household goods valued in money may perhaps somewhat exceed £1000; in real inward worth, their value was greater than that of most kingdoms—than all Napoleon's conquests, which did not endure. He saw his children grow up round him to guard him and do him honour; he had (ultimately) a hearty respect from *all*; could look forward from the verge of this Earth, rich and increased in goods, into an Everlasting Country where through the immeasurable Deeps shone a solemn sober Hope. I must reckon my Father one of the most *prosperous* men I have ever in my life known.[1]

[1] Thomas Carlyle, *Reminiscences* (ed. 1887), i. 43.

III.

His Religion.

Joel does not remind us of the great pre-Exilic prophets. He has no word of rebuke for his people. There is no rousing of their consciences by a sharp reminder of their sins, social, moral or religious. Yet he is not indifferent to this, he does not speak of sin because he assumes a quickened conscience which the hard blows of disaster had stung into life. He speaks to people who, he believes, know that they have sinned and who realize that Jehovah has sent the plague as a discipline. He assumes the need of repentance for all and summons them to it. He believes in the efficacy of united prayer and fasting, of the Temple services and ritual, in the value of outward means and symbols. We should call him to-day a churchman. But we must not overestimate his emphasis on the external side of religion. The heart of the matter is also for him the attitude of the spirit. Fasting and sackcloth he does not reject, but they are not enough. Repentance is a matter of the heart, and it must be sincere and thoroughgoing, if it is to avail at all.

1. The main thought of the prophecy is the idea of the *Day of the Lord*, a point of time in the history of the world at which the Lord Himself shall interpose, revealing Himself as all that He is, and bringing to an end openly all the work which in more hidden ways He has been performing from the beginning. The Day of the Lord is a day of terror and of blessing, the day of vengeance and the year of His redeemed; its issue is the salvation of His people, and the destruction of all that disturb their peace. It is a sifting of His people and the judging of all their enemies round about.

Most of the other thoughts of the prophecy arise out of this great conception; for example, the idea of an escaped Remnant, which shall constitute the saved at last. This idea is common to most of the prophets; Isaiah in his first writing (chap. vi.) expresses it in the figure of a tree cut down, of which the stock remains with power to send forth new shoots. But each prophet, when predicting the destruction of the nation, predicts it with

the reservation that the Lord will not wholly destroy His people —a Remnant shall return unto the Lord. Naturally in connexion with this the prophet gives prominence to the effective Divine call in salvation, saying, "And the residue are they whom the Lord shall call" (ii. 32); and he gives equal prominence to the faith of men on the other side, "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

"The day of Jehovah" is a phrase that plays a great part in the teaching of the prophets from the time when Amos rescued it from popular degradation. In Joel it seems to be rather a theological conception, a part of a creed than an actual vision. All through he works from the belief that "the day of Jehovah" is near; in the first stage a chastisement on Israel calling for penitence and prayer; in the second a day of doom for the foreign foe. In the other prophets the working out of this idea occurs in connexion with some real historical event which threatens the life or influences greatly the fortunes of Israel; here it is a general outlook into the future proceeding from the writer's religious beliefs. Its spiritual meaning is to some extent preserved in that it is preceded by a great act of humiliation, which makes prominent the acknowledgment that only by forgiveness and purification can even Israelites be prepared for the dreadful appearance of Jehovah's great Day. It is just as possible now as in the olden times for men to talk glibly of "the day of the Lord," and glory in its nearness without realizing its awful significance. It is also possible for us to cling to a system of thought and form of words out of which all definite meaning and living power has gone. We must re-think the old sacred phrases and refresh our minds by finding out what they once meant and what they still symbolize.

¶ Oh, brethren, let us learn this great lesson. We know not when the final day of decision is to be. But there is some day of decision in every age,—some great battle of truth and falsehood, of righteousness and injustice, of love and self-will,—in which we must one and all take part. There is a power of destruction at work in every society, in every heart. Do not fancy that you are less in danger from it than your forefathers were. It is nearest to you when you are least aware of its approaches, when you are least on your watch against it. A day may be very near at hand when the question will be forced upon every one, and when every one must give the answer to it, "Art thou on the side of self-

willed power or of righteousness? Dost thou worship the Devil or the Father of lights?" As that great and terrible day approaches, —terrible to every man who knows what the treachery of his own heart is, and yet most blessed, because in that day God will cast out the dividing destructive principle on which He has pronounced His sentence, which Christ died to overcome,—we must seek a fulfilment of the old promise which has never failed yet. Before any critical event, any world epoch, there has been vouchsafed to the humble and meek greater insight into the past, greater foresight of that which is to come. There has been a power of vision, a capacity of looking into the meaning of things, a discovery of the springs which lie beneath the surface, which are only granted when they are desired not for the glory of the seeker, but for the necessities of the Church and of mankind. It is not that there are more young or old men dreaming dreams in the sense which we sometimes give to that phrase; men flying from the facts of the world, dwelling in a region of fancy. The dreams which Joel and St. Peter speak of, indicate a closer contact with realities, a more inward communion with Him who is true, an intolerance of shadows, a longing for substance. Such dreams come not through the multitude of business nor through the listlessness which follows it. They come to earnest spirits struggling for life, wearied with the noise of the world, with the strife of nations and opinions, distrusting themselves, believing in God.[1]

2. Again Joel predicts more explicitly than others the *pouring out of the Spirit*, saying that the Spirit shall be poured out on all flesh, and all shall prophesy and know the Lord. This is not a prediction of the *event* of Pentecost, but of the new order of things, of which Pentecost was the first great example. And when he says "all flesh," though the expression is usual for mankind as a whole, his subsequent analysis of the phrase, "your sons and daughters," "your old men and young men," "the servants and handmaids," suggests that he merely meant to include all classes and ranks in Israel. The imagery of the prophet is common in other prophets, and has been imitated in the New Testament; thus, his delineation of the Day of the Lord reappears in our Lord's last discourse (Matt. xxiv. 29), and in the terrors that follow the opening of the sixth seal (Rev. vi. 12). The figures of the harvest and the winepress are adopted in Rev. xiv. 14; that of the locusts in Rev. ix.; and the image of the fountain

[1] F. D. Maurice, *The Prophets and Kings of the Old Testament*, 196.

going forth from the house of the Lord (Zech. xiii., Ezek. xlvii.) is reproduced in the river of the water of life (Rev. xxii. 4).

¶ The Spirit of God has not ceased to brood over this chaotic world; interpretations of Scripture vary, but the Power that lies behind them remains. We speak of Pentecostal days in the past tense through defective imagination and limited knowledge of present conditions. Three thousand converts were gathered together in a very small area at Pentecost. The area over which the Spirit works to-day is incomparably wider, and the triumphs of Christ, though less concentrated, are infinitely greater. To read such books as those lately published (C. F. Andrews, *The Renaissance in India*; N. Maclean, *Africa in Transformation*; George Eddy, *The New Era in Asia*), written by clear-eyed and sober witnesses, may convince us, if we are open to conviction, that greater works than those of Pentecost are silently but certainly done among us.

We have, perhaps, an exaggerated idea of the men inspired at Pentecost. Unconsciously we have thought that they belonged to some different order of beings to those of the present day. Such ideas are artificial, but habits of thought are easy to acquire and we adopt them without challenge. It has so long been the custom to speak of Pentecost as past that when its wonders are taking place under our very eyes we question it because it has not come in the way we were led to expect. We have magnified the first messengers of the Gospel beyond all human likeness, and it needs a revolution of our ideas to take in the fact that *these* are the days of Pentecost, that the men by whom the world is being evangelized, with whose faces and voices we are familiar, are the very descendants and followers of the apostolic preachers.[1]

3. The counterpart of the blessing outpoured on Israel is the *judgment upon the nations.* Joel predicts a great judicial act whereby Israel is to be finally delivered from its foes. There is no hint, even such as closed Zech. xiv., that the nations will one day be gathered into Jehovah's kingdom, and share the privileges and blessings of His covenant. Nevertheless, Joel differs from the later Apocalyptic writers in the fact that there are no "exaggerated national pretensions" in his book. The Israel of the future, upon which the Divine blessings are destined to descend, is the present Israel spiritually transformed (ii. 28) and *calling upon* Jehovah in faithfulness (ii. 32).

[1] Mrs. E. Trotter, *Lord Radstock* (1914), 244.

¶ That last chapter has in it some things that jar upon our Christian instincts. There is a certain vengeful delight in the thought of the destruction of Philistia, Phœnicia, and those other nations that have so harried Israel in the olden time. What of that? Why, that just means that the Old Testament has not in it the perfect sweetness, the fulness of Divine love, revealed in Jesus Christ. And have we Christians got it? I grant you this: a mechanical, an artificial, dead doctrine of Bible inspiration makes that into a difficulty; but a real, living recognition of the inspiring Spirit of God in those old prophets, in those actual messages of theirs, involves no difficulty whatever. But to the men who raise difficulties of that sort, who bring such reproaches against Old Testament prophets, I will make answer thus: Never mind the mixture of personal anger in it. Mark what Joel believed and comprehended! Mark the grandeur of that belief! To him this world was not a great congress of physical forces, of vegetable life, of animal life, where the nations were left to welter in their hostilities and ambitions, where every man had nothing higher to do than to grasp as much as he could of earth for his own selfish advantage. To Joel this world is a great drama; the history of humanity is a tragedy; this world is ruled and controlled by a holy, righteous God; this world exists for the production of ethical, religious, eternal character; this world is being sculptured into a kingdom of holiness, righteousness, truth, goodness, and love. I do not care how many defects and ignorances there are, I do not care how much of weak personal feeling mingles in Joel's declaration of that faith; but I tell you what it is: All that is grand, and great, and heroic, and good in our world has grown out of faith in man's soul, often dark and obscure and ignorant—faith that this world belongs to God, is ruled by God, and shall at last be judged by God. Oh! a faith like that in a real God, a God that cares whether we serve Him, or whether we do not; a God that will take the trouble to reckon with us, and with our age, and with all the ages, and with this world of ours at last—that is a faith that lifts a man above himself, up above the world, and that stirs him to chivalrous and glorious achievements; a faith that builds up the great realm of ethical glory and grandeur, of religious aspiration, and hope, and love; the finest outcome of our world's struggle, and trial, and battle.[1]

4. The prophets, in their visions of the future, throw out great and ennobling *ideals*, but ideals which, in many cases, are not

[1] W. G. Elmslie, *Expository Lectures and Sermons*, 93.

destined to be realized literally in fact. That is the case with Joel. The contrast between Israel and the nations is typical of the great contrast between good and evil, between truth and falsehood, which is ever being exemplified in the history of the world, which has already resulted often in the partial triumph of right over wrong, and which, we may be sure, will in the end result in its complete triumph; but this triumph, we may be not less sure, can never be gained in the form in which Joel's imagination pictured it. The thought of Israel being saved, and the nations being exterminated, may be a form in which the victory of good over evil naturally presented itself to a prophet living in Joel's age, when truth and right were, or at least seemed to be, confined largely to Israel: it is not the form in which it has been realized hitherto; nor is it the form in which it can ever be realized in the future. A restoration of Israel to its own land, coupled with the destruction of all other nations, is not only opposed to the teaching of other prophets, who saw more deeply into the purposes of God; it is opposed to the plainest teaching of Christ and His Apostles, according to which the gospel is to be preached in the whole world, disciples are to be made of all nations, and there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, between bond and free.

About four centuries after this, the Roman armies gathered round Jerusalem; in spite of the resistance of noble patriots and fierce fanatics they succeeded in levelling its walls, capturing its citadel, and desecrating its Temple. Since then broken-hearted Judaism has suffered the scorn of a thoughtless, cruel world. And yet in a real sense the movement of history has justified the prophet's teaching. The judgment against the nations has worked itself out. The light trivial tribes have vanished, leaving hardly a trace behind. The great empires founded by force, and driven by selfish greed, have crumbled to pieces. The Oriental empires that were the most splendid specimens of earthly magnificence have left the smallest legacy to humanity. To-day we all acknowledge the truth that Hebrew prophets saw so clearly, and sometimes proclaimed so fiercely, namely this, that there is a judgment-day for nations; that sensuality, cruelty, and greed not only injure the victims and outrage the law of Heaven, but cause the life of the proud nation to become rotten at the core.

On the other side there has also been fulfilment. The Christian religion proved itself the true successor of ancient prophecy by the way in which it seized the eternal part and lifted it to fuller beauty and larger power. Jerusalem does in a very real sense abide for ever and send forth a living message. It may be that in many forms Babylon is with us still, but the judgment of the wise and thoughtful is not bewildered or perverted by the glamour of worldly success. We can see that Judaism, even when it was defeated and disheartened, preserved many truths and laws needful for the highest life of the world. And we can cherish the clear, strong conviction that the message of mercy, the evangel of love which finds its fullest expression in the suffering Christ, gives nobler meaning to prophetic hope and vindicates in even a larger way the eternal righteousness.

¶ Israel's visible Jerusalem is in ruins; and how, then, shall men "call Jerusalem the throne of the Eternal, and all the nations shall be gathered unto it"? But the true Israel was Israel the bringer-in and defender of the idea of *conduct*, Israel the lifter-up to the nations of the banner of *righteousness*. The true Jerusalem was the city of this ideal Israel. And this ideal Israel could not and cannot perish, so long as its idea, righteousness and its necessity, does not perish, but prevails. Now, that it does prevail, the whole course of the world proves, and the fall of the actual Israel is of itself witness. Thus, therefore, the ideal Israel for ever lives and prospers; and its city is the city whereunto all nations and languages, after endless trials of everything else except conduct, after incessantly attempting to do without righteousness and failing, are slowly but surely gathered.

To this Israel are the promises, and to this Israel they are fulfilled. "The nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish, yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted." It is so; since all history is an accumulation of experiences that what men and nations fall by is want of *conduct*. To call it by this plain name is often not amiss, for the thing is never more great than when it is looked at in its simplicity and reality. Yet the true name to touch the soul is the name Israel gave: *righteousness*. And to Israel, as the representative of this imperishable and saving idea of righteousness, all the promises come true, and the language of none of them is pitched too high. *The Eternal*, Israel says truly, *is on my side*. "Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and thou handful Israel! I will help thee, saith the Eternal. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands, thy walls are continually

before me. The Eternal hath chosen Zion; O pray for the peace of Jerusalem! they shall prosper that love thee. Men shall call Jerusalem *the throne of the Eternal*, and all the nations shall be gathered unto it. And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death in victory." [1]

[1] Matthew Arnold, *Literature and Dogma*, 205.

AMOS.

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AMOS.

I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was an herdman, and a dresser of sycomore trees: and the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel.—Amos vii. 14, 15.

1. Amos appears at the very dawn of literary prophecy. We do not know that he wrote down his discourses with his own hand, or dictated them to a scribe in order that they might be preserved in book form. Jeremiah is the earliest prophet of whom this is distinctly recorded, and Ezekiel the first who made writing take the place of speech, actually composing and publishing his message in a literary form. But we have the utterances of Amos in a book, and this is the most ancient prophetic book that we possess. Elijah and Elisha appeared a hundred years before Amos, and Samuel's date would be some four centuries earlier than that. Meanwhile, other prophets cross the stage of history—such as Nathan and Gad. But none of these inspired teachers has left literary remains. We have no reason to believe that any of them was in the habit of delivering set discourses. It would seem that these prophets of antiquity were more like soothsayers, to whom people resorted for supernatural counsel in times of emergency, and in their own original action messengers from God with definite revelations and commands spoken as brief pointed messages. As far as we can see, Amos appears to be the first preaching prophet.

2. The period in which Amos prophesied is fixed by the title, the testimony of which is supported by the internal evidence of the book, and the mention in vii. 10, 11 of Jeroboam (II.) as king of Israel at the time of the prophet's visit to Bethel. It is true, we cannot define precisely the year in Jeroboam's reign in which Amos made thus his first appearance as a prophet; for though

the same title states that this was "two years before the earthquake," and though the memory of "the earthquake in the days of king Uzziah" survived till long afterwards (Zech. xiv. 5), it is not mentioned in the historical books, and we are consequently ignorant of the year in which it occurred. But we shall hardly be far wrong if we place the ministry of Amos in the latter part of Jeroboam's reign, *i.e.*, probably between 760 and 750 B.C.; for from the whole tenor of his book it cannot be doubted that the successes which gave Israel its prosperity and opulence had been already gained. The material and moral condition in which Israel thus found itself gives the clue to Amos's prophecy.

I.

The Prophet.

1. Of the personal life and history of this great prophet and great man scarcely anything is known. It is almost certain that he was a Judæan by birth: Am. i. 1 is not absolutely decisive, but, taken in conjunction with vii. 12, it seems to prove that he was a citizen of the Southern Kingdom. The attempts which have been made to prove his Northern origin from the spelling of certain words must be pronounced failures. He owned a small flock of a peculiar breed of sheep, ugly and short-footed, but valuable for their excellent wool. These he pastured in the neighbourhood of Tekoa in the wilderness of Judah. Part of his livelihood was derived from the lightly-esteemed fruit of a few sycomore trees. His own account of himself gives us the impression that, though poor, he was independent, and able, when occasion demanded, to leave his flock for a while. This is more probable than the supposition that he brought his sheep with him from Tekoa to Bethel.

2. How Amos came to be a prophet he tells us himself. He was no prophet by education or profession: he did not belong to one of those prophetic guilds, of which we read especially in the days of Elisha, and to which young Israelites, especially if warmed by religious enthusiasm, were in the habit of attaching themselves. Of the manner of the prophet's life before his call to

prophesy, beyond what we can imagine from his occupation, we know nothing; nor of the causes, if any secondary causes there were, that induced him to cross the border, and testify against the Northern Kingdom. He was a simple countryman, a man no doubt of a religious frame of mind, who often in the solitude of the moorland meditated on the things of God, but one whose regular business was with his flocks on the hills, or among the sycomores in the dale. And he was actually following his shepherd's occupation at the moment when he became conscious of the summons to be a prophet—"And the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel." In obedience to the summons, Amos left his native country of Judah, and visited the sister kingdom of Israel, then in the height of prosperity, to which it had been raised by the successes of Jeroboam II.

But though a simple shepherd, Amos was no unlettered clown, as the old commentators supposed. He was familiar with the history of his own nation and the neighbouring States; he had an intimate knowledge of what was going on in Damascus and Tyre, in Moab and Edom; he knew about the movements of the peoples; he knew that the Philistines came from Caphtor, and the Syrians from Kir, as well as that Israel had been redeemed from Egypt; he thoroughly understood the politics of his age, and he was keenly alive to the social and religious condition not only of his own country, but also of the Northern Kingdom.

3. Like the unnamed prophet from Judah in the days of the first Jeroboam, Amos suddenly appeared at the royal sanctuary of Bethel with the message of a Divine judgment which could no longer be averted. Israel appeared to be at the height of her prosperity. The long war with Syria had been a bitter struggle, and at one time the nation was almost annihilated, but it emerged from the contest victorious and stronger than it had ever been. Success strengthened its confidence in Jehovah. There was no danger of a relapse into idolatry, as in the days of Solomon or Ahab. Every Israelite was an enthusiastic worshipper of Jehovah, for a great religious revival had accompanied the successes of Jeroboam II. The sanctuaries were thronged, offerings poured in, the festivals were scrupulously observed.

A spirit of devotion seems to have prevailed: men eagerly entered the ranks of the prophetic order, or embraced the rigid discipline of the Nazirites. Above all, the Israelites felt that they were the chosen people of Jehovah. They gloried in the name of Israel; they spoke of their country as "the high place of Isaac"; they styled themselves the House of Jacob, and the House of Joseph. The adventures of Jacob and Joseph, and the deliverance from Egypt, were apparently familiar to all.

But the religion of Israel was as hollow as its prosperity was delusive. Amos knew of another side to the case—at first by report, then more fully after he had visited the scene. The poor were oppressed—for all this superabundance of wealth had not extinguished poverty. On the contrary, it had widened the chasm between the very rich and the very poor. Heartless creditors, wrapping themselves in their poor debtors' pledged garments, had the effrontery to lounge in them on the very pavement of the sanctuary. At the feast they gorged in gluttony and drank themselves into a state of intoxication as the performance of a religious ceremonial. The slime of the serpent was over their religion. Grossest immorality mixed itself up with what pretended to be the worship of God.

4. The task which confronted Amos, therefore, was not inviting. His solemn face, his rude attire, and, above all, his accent, which indicated that he was a native of insignificant Judah, must have aroused at once a violent prejudice against him in the minds of that gay throng which streamed up to celebrate a great feast-day at the wealthy and popular shrine at Bethel. His message also was one of uncompromising denunciation; for while, on the barren uplands which extend from Tekoa, his home, eastward toward the Dead Sea, he had watched the patient sheep, and meditated long and deeply upon the evils and dangers of the present situation, Jehovah had revealed to him an ideal of justice which threw into startling relief the injustice rampant in Israel. Simple, straightforward, fearless man that he was, with no attempt at palliation he laid bare all its social and religious corruption, and declared that, as sure as Jehovah was a God of justice, He must and would destroy that corrupt Northern Kingdom.

How much of his prophecy he actually spoke, how far the symbolism which he used was intelligible to the audience, we cannot say, but at least the last words were plain enough: "The sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste; and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword." They were so plain and so menacing that the priest Amaziah took alarm, and sent word to the king, accusing Amos of treason and conspiracy against the Government. Evidently there was reason to fear that the oppressed poor might be stirred up to revolt against their lords and masters. "The land is not able to bear all his words," was his suggestive confession. Apparently not waiting for an order from Jeroboam, Amaziah forthwith commanded Amos to flee back to Judah, and there gain a living by prophesying, if he could, but never again to open his mouth at the royal sanctuary of Bethel.

5. Then follows the prophet's indignant disclaimer of the priestly insinuation, a solemn repetition of his prediction of judgment, which would fall with special weight upon the family of the priest himself, "and Israel shall surely be led away captive out of his land." What took place after this we are not told. It is not improbable that that act of tyranny, which brought the mission of Amos to an abrupt end, led him to preach with the pen when his lips were silenced, and thus rendered his words immortal.

¶ In Carlyle the sense of having a mission was the growth of the actual presence in him of the necessary powers. Certain associations, certain aspects of human life and duty, had forced themselves upon him as truths of immeasurable consequence which the world was forgetting. He was a *vates*, a seer. He perceived things which others did not see, and which it was his business to force them to see. He regarded himself as being charged actually and really with a message which he was to deliver to mankind, and, like other prophets, he was "straitened" till his work was accomplished. For the new matter which he had to utter he had to create a new form corresponding to it. He had no pulpit from which to preach, and through literature alone had he any access to the world which he was to address. Even "a man of letters" must live while he writes, and Carlyle had imposed conditions upon himself which might make the very

keeping himself alive impossible; for his function was sacred to him, and he had laid down as a fixed rule that he would never write merely to please, never for money, that he would never write anything save when specially moved to write by an impulse from within; above all, never to set down a sentence which he did not in his heart believe to be true, and to spare no labour till his work to the last fibre was as good as he could possibly make it.[1]

II.

The Prophecy.

The Book of Amos falls naturally into three parts—chaps. i.–ii., iii.–vi., vii.–ix. 10, with an epilogue, ix. 11–15. The first two chapters are an introduction to the story of the retribution which is to be consummated in the many disasters that are to overtake Judah and Israel for their idolatrous and immoral practices. These are set forth in chaps. iii.–vi. with the solemn preface: "Hear ye the word." In chaps. vii.–ix. 10 the words of prophecy are strengthened and driven home by a series of visions that sum up in symbolic form the indictments and injunctions that precede. Chap. ix. 11–15 forms an epilogue, containing the promise of a brighter future.

1. The series of prophecies against the nations which forms the prologue to the book is noteworthy alike for the view of the universal sovereignty of Jehovah which it presents and for the doctrine of the moral responsibility of the heathen which it assumes. Here, in the earliest of the prophets whose date is universally acknowledged, Jehovah is already presented to view as the supreme Ruler of the world. That God will punish the wicked was a commonplace held by every Israelite. But Amos took an immense step forward when he asserted the universal character of this judgment. The judgment is upon all the nations of the world as it lay under the eye of the prophet; and each nation is judged for its particular sin. The cloud laden with disaster trails round the whole horizon, discharging itself upon the nations in succession—Syria, Edom, Ammon, Moab, the Philistines, and Phœnicia, Judah included—till it settles at last over Israel.

[1] J. A. Froude, *Thomas Carlyle, 1795–1835*, ii. 475.

The judgment comes from Jehovah, who dwells in Zion; it falls on all the nations, and it falls on them for their sin. That sin is regarded as inhumanity or injustice—the breach of those natural laws of piety written in the heart and conscience of man, by which the relation of man to man and nation to nation ought to be governed. The condemnation of these nations implies that even the heathen possessed some knowledge of right, which carried with it a corresponding degree of moral responsibility.

2. Then, swift as lightning, Amos hurls his blow at Israel herself. It was to Israel that Amos was specially sent, and upon her the full force of his moral indignation is let loose. The sins which were rife among the Israelites—covetousness and dishonesty, cruel treatment of the poor and defenceless, open violation of humane laws, perversion of justice, selfish and idle luxury, immorality and profanity—are all in succession dragged to the light and unsparingly denounced. Repeated chastisements have had no effect; the people are ripe for judgment; let them prepare to meet their God; to seek Him is the one condition of life; and if they do not seek Him, He will break forth as a consuming fire that none can quench. It must have been a rude shock to the easy-going security of the Israelites to learn that just because they were Jehovah's people He intended to punish them. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will visit upon you all your iniquities." It was a startling message, so exactly contrary to theory, so completely overturning established notions.

3. But Amos goes still further. Israel had another ground of assurance—her assiduity in religious performances, in the offering of sacrifices, so as to guarantee the continued goodwill of Heaven. Amos does not denounce the worship of Israel because it is a degraded form of religion, not (like his successor Hosea) because it is calf-worship, not because it is schismatical, not this mainly or primarily, but because it is offered by unrighteous and immoral worshippers, because it gives positive encouragement to the injustice, the sensuality, the barbarous treatment of the poor, which are the crying sins of Israel. The keynote of Amos is righteousness. He has nothing to say against this religion as

such, but it is useless, because it is mere ritual. He laughs, and says: "Bring all your offerings; keep your solemn fasts; and what good will come of it? None whatever; the Lord hates them all. What He demands is that justice shall flow down like a river, and unless righteousness is there, your worship shall be counted as a sin!"—the most astonishingly original message at that time.

¶ When men strive about the decorations of the altar, and the lights, and the rood screen, and the credence, and the piscina, and the sedilia, and the postures here and the postures there, and the people are not first diligently instructed in the holy mysteries, or brought to realize the Presence and the Sacrifice, no less than the commemorative Sacrament, what is it all but puerility, raised into the wretched dignity of profaneness by the awfulness of the subject-matter? Is there not already very visible mischief in the architectural pedantry displayed here and there, and the grotesque earnestness—about petty trivialities, and the stupid reverence for the *formal* past? Altars are the playthings of nineteenth century societies, and we are taught that the Church cannot change, modify, or amplify her worship; she is, so we learn, a thing of a past century, not a life of all centuries; and there is abusive wrangling and peevish sarcasm, while men are striving to force some favourite antiquated clothing of their own over the majestic figure of true, solid, abiding Catholicism. It is downright wickedness to be going thus *a-mumming* (a buffoonery doubtless correct enough out of some mediæval costume-book), when we should be doing plain work for our age and our neighbours. To see grown-up children, book in hand, *playing at mass*, putting ornament before truth, suffocating the inward by the outward, bewildering the poor instead of leading them, revelling in Catholic sentiment instead of offering the acceptable sacrifice of hardship and austerity—this is a fearful, indeed a sickening, development of the peculiar iniquity of the times, a masterpiece of Satan's craft.[1]

4. The last three chapters contain the same idea of the destruction of the nation, but conveyed in a variety of symbols seen in a series of five visions, interrupted in vii. 10–17 by an account of the altercation which took place between Amos and Amaziah at Bethel. The visions are followed, in each case, by longer or shorter explanatory comments; and their aim is to reinforce, under

[1] F. W. Faber, *Life of St. Wilfrid*, 205.

an effective symbolism, the truth which Amos desired to impress, viz., that the judgment which he had announced as impending upon Israel could now no longer be averted, and that though Jehovah had once and again "repented" of His purpose, He could do so no more; the time for mercy had now passed by.

The last vision presents a most graphic picture: the false worshippers are represented as gathered together in the temple at Bethel, and Jehovah commands to smite the pillars, that the fabric may fall upon the heads of all of them—they are buried in the ruins of their false religion. And, if any escape, the sword of the Lord shall pursue them, that not one shall save himself, and all the sinners of the people shall be cut off.

Then follows the bright picture of the restitution: the tabernacle of David that is fallen down shall be raised up; the kingdom shall assume its old boundaries from the sea unto the river; nature shall be transfigured; and the people shall dwell for ever in the land given them by their God. If we could be sure that this was genuine, we should have seriously to modify our conception of Amos as the stern herald of doom. But since grave doubts have been raised as to whether this glowing picture really comes from Amos, it is not safe to bring it into our materials for a portrait of the prophet's character. It seems to refer especially to the Southern Kingdom in speaking of the tabernacle of David, and that after its overthrow; moreover, we miss here the strong ethical vein that runs through the whole book up to this point. Without a word about repentance and a change of heart and conduct, even without promising forgiveness of the wicked past, this oracle serenely predicts a delightful future. The hiatus is too great to be lightly passed over.

5. Amos's message could hardly by the largest charity be described as a gospel of grace. It is the gospel of law—for that, too, is a gospel: to understand and obey the laws by which God governs His world is the way of peace, to ignore or defy them is the way to destruction. True child of the desolate pasture-land as he was, he had learned from its phenomena the relentlessness of law; its occasional grim sights and eerie sounds had invested his imagination with a sort of sombre majesty. With Amos, God is the God of righteousness; he himself is the apostle of righteous-

ness; he is the preacher, whose moral nature is moved by the spectacle of outraged right, but who does not unbend in affection or sympathy; on the contrary, he announces Israel's doom with the austere severity of the judge.

God is righteousness—that is the thunder of Amos; God is love—that is the sweet song of Hosea. Amos and Hosea thus supplement each other, and a comparison of their writings furnishes an instructive illustration of the manner in which widely different natural temperaments may be made the organs of the same Divine Spirit, and how each, just in virtue of its difference from the other, may be thereby the better adapted to set forth a different aspect of the truth.

¶ The fundamental thought of Hosea, that the relation between Jehovah and Israel is a relation of love and of such duties as flow from love, gives his whole teaching a very different colour from that of Amos. Amos begins by looking on Jehovah as the Creator and God of the universe, who dispenses the lot of all nations and vindicates the laws of universal righteousness over the whole earth; and, when he proceeds to concentrate attention on his own people, the prophet still keeps the larger point of view before the mind of his hearers, and treats the sin and judgment of Israel as a particular case under the general laws of Divine government, complicated by the circumstance that Jehovah knows Israel and has personal communications with it in which no other nation shares. Hosea has no such universal starting-point; he deals with the subject not from the outside inwards but from the heart outwards. Jehovah's love to His own is the deepest thing in religion, and every problem of faith centres in it. To both prophets the distinction which we are wont to draw between religious and moral duties is unknown; yet it would not be unfair to say in modern language that Amos bases religion on morality, while Hosea deduces morality from religion. The two men are types of a contrast which runs through the whole history of religious thought and life down to our own days. The religious world has always been divided into men who look at the questions of faith from the standpoint of universal ethics, and men by whom moral truths are habitually approached from a personal sense of the grace of God. Too frequently this diversity of standpoint has led to an antagonism of parties in the Church. Men of the type of Amos are condemned as rationalists and cold moderates; or, on the other hand, the school of Hosea are looked upon as enthusiasts and unpractical mystics. But Jehovah chose His prophets from

men of both types, and preached the same lesson to Israel through both.[1]

6. Amos was the prophet of wrath; therefore he writes with severe, never-hesitating pen. Yet he is always so grandly clear in his meaning that this eldest of the Prophetic authors is the easiest to understand among them all. Some have said his style is that of a peasant; and certainly he is a representative of the fashion of life that was common among the rough shepherds and peasants, and he speaks with unpolished plainness. He never spares even the coarsest word as he attacks the great ladies of Samaria, or the distinguished priest at the temple of the king. He can handle his language with a master's skill; every sentence is full of meaning, and every word strikes the mark. But his prophecy is no fiery scroll written over with lamentation and wailing. The prophet points out the terrible diseases from which the community is suffering, and he declares in no uncertain tones what the end must be, but he does not suggest that the case is incurable. He is no pessimist, but a trenchant satirist and exposer of abuses in "an evil time." Although he has the deepest sympathy with the oppressed and the strongest antipathy to their oppressors, the social aspect of the prophecy is secondary, while the spiritual aspect is primary, if not predominant. For in the spiritual world alone lies the remedy for the inequalities and injustices of this. The eternal principle of righteousness, "Seek ye Me, and ye shall live," to which, as the Rabbis said, Amos has reduced the 613 commands of the Mosaic law, is after all the only true solution of all social problems.

¶ The business of government, according to a certain school of politicians, is concerned only with the material interests of the Nation. "Laws," it is said, "cannot make the people moral, and the Nation being an end to itself its relation to other Nations is not subject to moral criteria." "We are legislators, not moralists," was the position taken by a statesman in a recent parliamentary debate. Those who engage in the business of governing the Nation are, according to this view, concerned only to secure comfort, wealth and power. They have no need to ask whether a law will raise or lower the moral standard, or whether a policy is likely to increase peace and goodwill in the world. Their one

[1] W. Robertson Smith, *The Prophets of Israel*, 163.

object is material advantage, and their best guide is the business instinct which foresees the gain and loss of different courses. They have to do with profit and not with morals. "Things are in the saddle and ride mankind" is their motto.

Professor Sir Henry Jones, representing another school of politicians, has in a recent book set himself to show that of the two factors, material wealth and moral character, which make a Nation, the latter is that which is important. Moral character is more powerful than silver and gold in increasing happiness at home and in fixing the rank which a Nation holds in the estimation of foreigners. Righteousness exalteth a Nation. Avarice, craft and fear never yet built a State, and the builders of Nations which impress mankind like the builders of our cathedrals have built better than they knew. A light of morality has shined in the darkness when the darkness comprehended it not. Moral character is the greatest national asset.[1]

[1] S. A. Barnett, *Religion and Politics*, 11.

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OBADIAH.

As thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee; thy dealing shall return upon thine own head.—Obad. 15.

And saviours shall come up on Mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the Kingdom shall be the Lord's.—Obad. 21.

1. THE Book of Obadiah is the smallest among the prophets, and the smallest in all the Old Testament. It raises no doctrinal issue nor any question of historical accuracy. All that it claims to be is *The Vision of Obadiah.* It mentions neither his father nor his birthplace, and in the book itself there is no positive statement of the period in which he lived, nor any quite definite clue to determine the date of his prophecy. All we know certainly about him is his name. That is a derivative of a word meaning servant or worshipper, and the sacred name of Israel's covenant-God. It is a type of name common in Semitic languages (Abdeel, Abdallah, etc.), and it occurs very frequently of persons mentioned in the Old Testament—especially of members of the tribe of Levi. Among these the best known are a captain of King Ahab (1 Kings xviii.) and a prince employed by Jehoshaphat in the religious reform attempted in his reign (2 Chron. xvii. 7).

2. The object of Obadiah's book is to denounce the pride and malignity of Edom, and to predict the judgment about to descend on it and on "all the nations." In the great "day of Jehovah" the one hope of salvation will be on Mount Zion. Hebrew captives will be restored to their home, and Jehovah's kingdom will be finally established. Deliverers will come up on Mount Zion who "shall judge the mount of Esau." We shall therefore trace the history of the relations between Israel and Edom before we turn to the prophet and his prophecy.

I.

Israel and Edom.

1. The two nations were neighbours with bitter memories and rival interests. Each of them was possessed by a strong sense of distinction from the rest of mankind, which goes far to justify the story of their common descent. But while in Israel this pride was due chiefly to the consciousness of a peculiar destiny not yet realized—a pride painful and hungry—in Edom it took the complacent form of satisfaction in a territory of remarkable isolation and self-sufficiency, in large stores of wealth, and in a reputation for worldly wisdom—a fulness that recked little of the future, and felt no need of the Divine.

From the southern extremity of the Dead Sea to the Gulf of Akaba runs the deep valley of the Arabah. On the eastern side of this valley rises the lofty range of red hills called Mount Seir, stretching about a hundred miles north and south, by twenty miles east and west. Here Esau settled; and his descendants, having driven out the original possessors, the Horites, occupied the whole of the mountain.

¶ The purple mountains, into which the wild sons of Esau chambered, run out from Syria upon the desert, some hundred miles by twenty of porphyry and red sandstone. They are said to be the finest rock scenery in the world. "Salvator Rosa never conceived so savage and so suitable a haunt for banditti." From Mount Hor, which is their summit, you look down upon a maze of mountains, cliffs, chasms, rocky shelves and strips of valley. On the east the range is but the crested edge of a high, cold plateau, covered for the most part by stones, but with stretches of corn land and scattered woods. The western walls, on the contrary, spring steep and bare, black and red, from the yellow of the desert 'Arabah. The interior is reached by defiles, so narrow that two horsemen may scarcely ride abreast, and the sun is shut out by the overhanging rocks. Eagles, hawks and other mountain birds fly screaming round the traveller. Little else than wild-fowls' nests are the villages; human eyries perched on high shelves or hidden away in caves at the ends of the deep gorges. There is abundance of water. The gorges are filled with tamarisks, oleanders, and wild figs. Besides the wheat lands on the eastern plateau, the wider defiles hold fertile fields and terraces

for the vine. Mount Esau is, therefore, no mere citadel with supplies for a limited siege, but a well-stocked, well-watered country, full of food and lusty men, yet lifted so high, and locked so fast by precipice and slippery mountain, that it calls for little trouble of defence. "Dweller in the clefts of the rock, the height is his habitation, that saith in his heart: Who shall bring me down to earth?"[1]

2. A modern writer of romance would find ample material in a study of Edom and its inhabitants. The history of its relationship towards Israel through long centuries is of exceptional interest. From first to last it is a quarrel between brothers—rival brothers. Esau is a "profane person," with no conscience of a birthright, no faith in the future, no capacity for visions; dead to the unseen, and clamouring only for the satisfaction of his appetites. The same was probably the character of his descendants, who had, of course, their own gods, like every other people in that Semitic world, but were essentially irreligious, living for food, spoil and vengeance, with no national conscience or ideals—a kind of people who deserved even more than the Philistines to have their name descend to our times as a symbol of hardness and obscurantism. It is no contradiction to all this that the one intellectual quality imputed to the Edomites should be that of shrewdness and a wisdom which was obviously worldly.

¶ "The wise men of Edom, the cleverness of Mount Esau" were notorious. It is the race which has given to history only the Herods—clever, scheming, ruthless statesmen, as able as they were false and bitter, as shrewd in policy as they were destitute of ideals. "That fox," cried Christ, and crying stamped the race.[2]

¶ Clever men will recognize and tolerate nothing but cleverness; every authority rouses their ridicule, every superstition amuses them, every convention moves them to contradiction. Only force finds favour in their eyes, and they have no toleration for anything that is not purely natural and spontaneous. And yet ten clever men are not worth one man of talent, nor ten men of talent worth one man of genius. And in the individual, feeling is more than cleverness, reason is worth as much as feeling, and conscience has it over reason. If, then, the clever man is not *mockable*, he may at least be neither loved, nor considered, nor esteemed. He may make himself feared, it is true, and force

[1] G. A. Smith, *The Book of the Twelve Prophets*, 178. [2] *Ibid.* 181.

others to respect his independence; but this negative advantage, which is the result of a negative superiority, brings no happiness with it. Cleverness is serviceable for everything, sufficient for nothing.[1]

3. The insults which the Edomites inflicted on Israel were many. When the Israelites came out of Egypt they begged to be permitted to pass through the Edomite territory, but the request was churlishly refused. When Judah was carried captive by Nebuchadnezzar and Jerusalem destroyed, "in the neighbouring heathen tribes," says Dean Stanley,[2] "there was a savage exultation—more bitter to the heart of Judah than the calamity itself—in the thought that the Divine inheritance had now passed into their hands. But deepest of all was the indignation roused by the sight of the nearest of kin, the race of Esau, often allied to Judah, often independent, now bound by the closest union with the power that was truly the common enemy of both. There was an intoxication of delight in the wild Edomite chiefs, as at each successive stroke against the venerable walls they shouted, 'Down with it! down with it! even to the ground.' They stood in the passes to intercept the escape of those who would have fled down to the Jordan valley; they betrayed the fugitives; they indulged their barbarous revels on the Temple hill. Long and loud has been the wail of execration which has gone up from the Jewish nation against Edom. It is the one imprecation which breaks forth from the Lamentations of Jeremiah; it is the culmination of the fierce threats of Ezekiel; it is the sole purpose of the short sharp cry of Obadiah; it is the bitterest drop in the sad recollections of the Israelite captives by the waters of Babylon; and the one warlike strain of the Evangelical Prophet is inspired by the hope that the Divine Conqueror should come knee-deep in Idumean blood (Is. lxiii. 1–3)."

4. Thus we reach Obadiah, and his "short sharp cry." The Jews had lost their political independence and military power and could no longer expect to punish foreign insolence by force. But they had not lost their keen sense of justice and their ardent hope that some day Jehovah would set all things right in

[1] *Amiel's Journal* (ed. 1891), 134.
[2] *History of the Jewish Church*, ii. 472.

this world and restore His nation Israel to her former glory. And again a man of patriotic heart and prophetic mind arose and gave utterance to this hope and brought the judgment of Edom into this larger connexion. Formerly the great movements of history as they affected the fate of Israel could be interpreted by the prophets as parts of Jehovah's plan. There were no such movements now, no nation like the Assyrians or Babylonians, no king like Cyrus, that a prophetic mind could regard as Jehovah's special instrument. But Jehovah was living still and controlling the affairs of this world, and He was just, and He was still Israel's God. This our prophet knows and believes with all the intensity of his spirit. And out of the living experience of the reality and truth of these convictions there grows afresh in his heart the hope, which becomes an assurance, that the day is near when Jehovah will put right all the affairs of this world, when He will judge all nations. It will be a terrible day. But only for the other nations, not for the Jews, for they have already received their punishment at the hands of Jehovah. Through this coming awful crisis those who are still left will pass unharmed, and after the catastrophe they will dwell once more safely on Mount Zion, never to be driven out again by foreign invaders. On the contrary, they themselves will then drive out the nations that had dispossessed them and taken their property. Then also Edom's turn will come, then that cruel brother Esau also will receive his reward at the hands of Jacob, who will exterminate him.

5. The rest of the history of the Edomites is soon told. The Maccabees waged successful wars against them. Judas Maccabæus defeated them at Arabattine (1 Macc. v. 3), recovered the south country, and recaptured Hebron. John Hyrcanus compelled the Edomites who were settled there to accept circumcision and to conform to the law. The Edomites appear for the last time during the great struggle of the Jews with Rome. After the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus their name disappears from history.

¶ It may seem a far cry to this long-since extirpated tribe in the rocky clefts above the Jordan, and yet the worldling temper lives and scorns and exults in the day of the Church's sorrow now as then. That temper is ever with us. Mr. Howells, the shrewd

American observer, tells us in his *London Films* that as he stands at Hyde Park Corner he marks the faces of those who drive out and in. The look on their faces is not simply authoritative, as all ruling races show. It is the look of the authorised. It displays openly a sense of security, through the wealth which has been safely invested, a self-sufficiency, which comes of proud independence of others, and, above all, a remorseless indifference to the needs and sorrows of others. That is the Edomite temper. Behind it there is a sheer unbelief in God, a heart-mockery of the ideals of Christ, a self-assertion against all the claims of religion which makes the word "gospel" a byword and jest. They are the people; for them all else exists; no one will pull them down from their seat. The calamities of a Church, the hardships of its preachers, the anguish of its people, are a theme for their scorn. Now and again one meets this temper in some successful man of the world, whose business has eaten up his humility and his reverence. As often it appears in some man of letters of a cheap and transient popularity. No man of Thackeray's insight or of Matthew Arnold's sympathy could ever play the part of the Edomite, however they might rebuke cant and expose unreality. But the Edomites of literature sit on high, and in their pride the "little ones" of Christ are their scorn.[1]

II.

The Prophet and his Prophecy.

1. The personality of Obadiah, as of so many of the Minor Prophets, lies deep in shadow. It is obvious that we cannot characterize him from the few verses that he wrote. But we are aware that his strong way of putting things, his graphic descriptions, his love for striking pictures, his quick exclamations, his impassioned warnings throbbing with anger and sorrow, made all aglow by a wonderfully vivid imagination, reveal a strong, passionate nature uncurbed by prophetic discipline and experience. He heard Jehovah in the voice of older prophecy and of history, and on the basis of his profound belief in the consistency and justice of Jehovah, he interpreted the stirring events of his time.

2. As in the case of Joel, so in that of Obadiah, a book of similar tendency, the question of *date* is uncertain. The settle-

[1] *The Church Pulpit Commentary* (Jeremiah to Malachi), 319.

ment of this point turns mainly upon the relation of Obadiah to Jeremiah xlix. 7–22. But the general standpoint in regard to *the nations*, which are objects of judgment not of grace, may betoken either an early or a late date. The day of distress mentioned in Obad. 11–14 may have been the destruction of the city and the Temple by the Chaldæans in 586; or it may have been some earlier occasion, such as the capture of the city by united bands of Philistines and Arabs in Jehoram's reign (848–844) described in 2 Chron. xxi. 16, 17. There seems to be one verse of Joel (ii. 32) which makes a distinct reference to Obadiah 17. If he is post-Exilic he cannot have been later than Joel. In any case the terms used of Edom's conduct by Obadiah seem to be too strong to refer to any mere predatory excursion. On the whole it seems best to treat the question of date as entirely open; but the indications are in favour of the conclusion that the book, in its present form, while it incorporates earlier elements, belongs to the post-Exilic period, when the former fate of Edom was perhaps commonly regarded as "an episode in Jehovah's judgment on the heathen generally."

3. The Book of Obadiah is a well-constructed unity, clear and direct in aim, terse in expression. It is characterized by sound moral feeling and firm religious faith. The style is blunt and soldier-like—not rich or graceful in any way, but full of rugged dramatic force. "The speech of Obadiah," says Umbreit, "comes as if freshly quarried from the rocks. He has no flowery expressions, no picturesque descriptions; it is as though he had hewn out his prophecy from the cliffs of Petra."

¶ Pusey's quotation from Hugo of St. Victor may put us on the track of deriving a true spiritual lesson from the little book: "Obadiah is simple in language, manifold in meaning; few in words, abundant in thoughts, according to that 'the wise man is known by the fewness of his words.' He directeth his prophecy, according to the letter, against Edom; allegorically he inveighs against the world; morally against the flesh. Bearing an image of the Saviour, he hinteth at His coming through whom the world is destroyed, through whom the flesh is subdued, through whom freedom is restored."[1]

[1] R. F. Horton, *The Minor Prophets*, 183.

4. In the Book of Obadiah, as we have seen, the special foe of Israel is Edom. The offence of Edom was aggravated by the nearness of its kinship to Israel. Observe the passionate force of the term "brother" in the tenth verse: "for the slaughter, for the outraging of thy *brother*, shame doth cover thee." The bitter strain of the Book of Obadiah is explained to a great degree in the use of that word. The two races, despite their border warfare, had a common origin. "Blood is thicker than water." Whatever private division may have existed in a family or a nation, there is innate honour in the rule of nature which calls on brethren of one blood to stand shoulder to shoulder against a common foe. When, in the day of trouble, kinship is not only denied but kindred are seen fiercely triumphant over a rival brother and eagerly assisting the truculent enemy, human nature is outraged in its most sacred sentiments. Intellect and heart alike rebel against this desecration of the inner shrine. It is not merely the miserable, narrow-minded spite of such action that is so utterly contemptible to a naturally broad intellect; there is something worse. All thought of the generous, chivalric feeling that ennobles man and is native to those of one birth, even the meanest, is not only disregarded but trampled on.

¶ Man is seen at his lowest in heart and intellect when he denies the claim of blood-kinship; and when he adds to his callous offence a warm espousal of the cause of a ruthless oppressor, the treachery can scarcely be either forgotten or forgiven during the life of a man or that of a nation. If the massacre of Glencoe be recalled to the memory of Scotsmen, let it only be so to understand the undying sense of wrong that had so burned itself into the heart of the Jewish nation that the 137th Psalm—a beautiful, pathetic song of exile, which still brings tears to the eyes as we think of those who hung their harps on the willow trees by the waters of Babylon and sighed for a return to their beloved capital—is concluded with a curse on the old-time inhumanity and treachery of Edom.[1]

5. When the actual Edomites ceased to be, the name was transferred by the Jews first to tyrant Rome and then to persecuting Christendom, and the impassioned words of Obadiah became a favourite vehicle for the expression of national and religious hatred. That is a misunderstanding and a misuse of the

[1] T. McWilliam, *Speakers for God*, 188.

book. The prophecy is, indeed, instigated by indignation against Edom, and the retributive destruction of that people is its theme. But the subject is worked out in a large fashion that precludes the suspicion of petty vengefulness, and justifies the book's place in the record of revelation. The motive is not the gratification of national spite, nor is the aim either to warn or to edify the Edomites. The seer speaks out of the need of his own heart and to the hearts of his people. What creates his vision and compels its utterance is an indestructible sense of the eternal justice and fidelity, and of the Divine destiny of Israel in building up the Kingdom of God on earth. The tragedy of Edom is but a part in the great drama. It is therefore presented on a vast stage, and has the world's history for its background. Very real and concrete to the prophet, no doubt, are the antagonisms of Israel and his enemies, but none the less really and consciously, even if in a fashion grand beyond his conceptions, it is the collision of universal forces and everlasting principles that is embodied in them. Limited and material the presentment of those issues may be, but they carry in their bosom the consummation of the ages. Within the rivalry of Edom and Israel there was wrapped the eternal antithesis of truth and falsehood, good and evil; and the vision of an earthly kingdom on Mount Zion is finding its fulfilment in the silent, slow, but sure advent of the Kingdom of God and of our Christ.

¶ In a letter written from San Remo in the first week of February, 1874, Dr. Ker thus refers to the coming of the Kingdom of God: "This is an age of a very mixed character, so much to make one doubtful and anxious, and yet so much to encourage. Almost every part of the world has its little company of workers, who are looking about them to see how they can make the world better and help the coming kingdom of truth and peace. I have been struck with this in moving about, and I find that when you break through the first reserve there are more people thinking about these things than one at first imagines. The olives cover all the hills as I look out at this window, with their unvaried smoky-green (I do not mean to say I dislike them for all that) yet they never show the touch of spring's finger on their leaves; but underneath, I know, in many sheltered nooks already, are the sweet-scented violets and hyacinths and purple anemones, and the fig-tree is putting forth her green figs, and we know that summer is nigh."[1]

[1] *Letters of the Rev. John Ker*, 237.

JONAH.

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„ „ (Single-volume, 1909) 491 (W. T. Smith).

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JONAH.

And the Lord said, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: and should not I have pity on Nineveh, that great city; wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?—Jon. iv. 10, 11.

THE story of the wilful prophet is one of the best known and most misunderstood in the Old Testament—an occasion for jest to the mocker, a cause of bewilderment to the literalist believer, but a reason for joy to the critic. The Old Testament reaches here one of its highest points, for the doctrine of God receives in it one of its clearest and most beautiful expressions, and the spirit of prophetic religion is revealed at its truest and best.

1. The Book of Jonah used to be regarded as Jonah's composition, but that belief is now generally abandoned, except in the Roman Catholic Church. Since Nineveh is clearly referred to as no longer standing—"Now Nineveh *was* an exceeding great city" (iii. 3)—the *terminus a quo* cannot be placed earlier than about 600 B.C. (fall of Nineveh, 606 B.C.). The *terminus ad quem* is fixed by the mention of the Twelve Prophets in Sirach (xlix. 10), *c.* 200 B.C. The date therefore lies between 600 and 200.

The ancient Jews seem to have regarded the book as historical (3 Macc. vi. 8; Tob. xiv. 4, 8; Jos., *Ant.* IX. x. 2), and were followed by Christian interpreters. Modern scholars are greatly divided. Archdeacon Perowne, J. Kennedy, and Clay Trumbull have defended the old view. Kleinert, König, C. H. H. Wright, G. A. Smith, and Cheyne treat the book as an allegory of the fortunes of the people. Jonah "the dove" represents Israel. Jonah the prophet stands for Israel, which was to prophesy among the nations. The sea figures the destruction which repeatedly fell on Israel. Cheyne supplements the symbolical key by the mytho-

logical. The fish (that is, the dragon, the subterranean sea) refers to Babylon, which swallowed Israel, not to destroy it but to give opportunity for repentance; and the link between Jonah and the original myth is found in Jer. li. 34, 44. Kautzsch, Driver, Nowack, and Marti see in the story a didactic narrative founded on an ancient tradition.

2. The prominence given by Christian expositors to the incident of the fish has tended to obscure the chief aim of the writing—to protest against the narrowness of thought and sympathy which prevailed among the Jews of the time, and was daily growing in intensity. Whoever the author was, he had higher thoughts about God than most of his contemporaries, perhaps it may even be said than any other of the writers of the Old Testament, and entertained more charitable feelings towards the Gentile world than most of his people. The God of Israel, he believed, cared for all men. Penitent Gentiles—and many in Gentile circles were ready to repent if only they were taught—could obtain pardon as readily as penitent Jews. Nay, Jehovah sought their repentance. Nowhere in pre-Christian literature can be found a broader, purer, loftier, tenderer conception of God than in this little anonymous Hebrew tract. How high the teaching of the book rose above later Judaism, say the Judaism of the time of Christ and the following generation, is strikingly shown by the way in which it is summarized by Josephus (*Ant.* IX. x. 2). There is not a word there about the penitence of the Ninevites, or God's remonstrance with Jonah. The main lesson of the book is absolutely ignored by the proud Pharisaic priest. Another leading thought of the book is the duty of Israel to make its God known to the Gentiles.

3. In the book itself there is anecdote and poetry, but no history, in the usual sense of that term. In this respect it is peculiar and unique among the so-called books of the prophets. In all the rest of these the contents are made up of the discourses of the prophets, more or less interleaved with contemporary history. The complete absence of both these elements from the Book of Jonah strikes every careful reader as marking it off from all the other memoirs of the prophets into a place and character

of its own. It is, in fact, a group of incidents so put together as to produce scenes of dramatic effect and also to imprint upon the reader's heart the evangelical lesson of the grace of God in the forgiveness of all true penitents.

I.

An Unwelcome Charge.

1. Jonah appears before us as a prophet on whom has been placed a burden that he is trying to shirk. He is commanded to go to the capital city of the fierce and merciless enemies of his people, and to proclaim the destruction of that city if its inhabitants do not repent of their sins.

Nineveh was the home of rapacity, injustice, violence, and cruelty, conducted on a truly imperial scale; and God, speaking to Jonah, says, "Their wickedness is come up before me." That proud city had sent forth its desolating armies into neighbouring kingdoms, through mere lust of conquest, and had aroused the intensest hatred of every conquered nation, and no less that of every nation which sympathized with the oppressed. The great city of the East must perish; and yet, only forty days before the appointed day of ruin, a voice of warning should reach it, proclaiming the justice, yet implying the tenderness, of God. Of that message of mercy Jonah was to be the bearer.

While God, then, was moved by the grace, compassion, and mercy of which Jonah speaks so admirably, and desired through the ministration of Jonah to bring the Ninevites to repentance, that He might save them, the preacher whom He chose was full of hatred toward them, and refused to go because he desired their destruction.

2. Jonah represents the national feelings, which he shared. Why did he refuse to go to Nineveh? Not because he was afraid of his life, or thought the task hopeless. He refused because he feared success. He had been brought up in the most narrow period of Jewish orthodoxy—the time when Israel believed in the limitation of Divine sympathy to her own work and her own borders. She looked upon herself as the only child of the human

family on whom the eye of the Father could complacently gaze. It was for her the earth was allowed to bloom. It was for her the natural mercies of God were still continued. It was for her the thunders of Divine judgment were prevented from falling. She believed herself to be the salt of the earth—that which kept the earth alive. All heathen lands were outside the sympathy of the Eternal. They moved in a circle of their own—a circle which had no point of contact with the plan of the world. The kingdom of God was a Jewish kingdom. The providence of God was a Jewish providence. The triumph of God was a Jewish triumph. Into this faith Jonah was born; in this faith he grew. He was reared in the belief of the *tribal* sympathy of God. He reached manhood in the persuasion that the salvation of the world meant the salvation of Israel, and that the climax of Divine grace would be attained in the glory of the Jewish nation.

Jewish prophets preached to Jews, and to Jews only. They often gave utterance concerning foreign nations, but only in their own land, or if in exile, as in the case of Ezekiel, still to their own people. Jonah is in an unheard-of position when commanded to bear his testimony in a foreign land, among Gentiles and heathen. Then the sequel, and indeed the whole cause of the book, make it manifest that the real purpose of his errand is to bring the Ninevites to repentance in order that the threatened destruction of their city may be averted. Thus it is to be an errand of mercy—and that to the heathen—a strange idea to come to a Jew! God's goodness was being stretched rather too far if it was going to take in Nineveh. Jonah did not want it to escape. If he had been sent to destroy it, he would probably have gone gladly. He grudged that heathen should share Israel's privileges, and probably thought that gain to Nineveh would be loss to Israel. It was exactly the spirit of the prodigal's elder brother. The thing that God did in sparing the city "displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. And he prayed unto the Lord, and said, I pray thee, O Lord, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil." That was the secret of his disobedience. He was indignant that the Lord should care for the haughty heathen city; indignant that he, a

Jewish prophet, should be charged to call an alien people to repentance; rather let the doom come down upon them without warning and without hope.

¶ Israel was set among the nations, not as a dark lantern, but, as the great lampstand in the Temple court proclaimed, to ray out light to all the world. Jonah's mission was but a concrete instance of Israel's charge. The nation was as reluctant to fulfil the reason of its existence as the Prophet was. Both begrudged sharing privileges with heathen dogs, both thought God's care wasted, and neither had such feelings towards the rest of the world as to be willing to be messengers of forgiveness to them. All sorts of religious exclusiveness, contemptuous estimates of other nations, and that bastard patriotism which would keep national blessings for our own country alone, are condemned by this story. In it dawns the first faint light of that sun which shone at its full when Jesus healed the Canaanite's daughter, or when He said, "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold."[1]

¶ It is frequently remarked that a certain individual is "very exclusive"; or that certain society, supposed to comprehend within itself many desirable qualities, "is a very exclusive society." The expression is invariably held to be of the most complimentary nature imaginable, and the *grande dame* who could achieve the reputation of being the most exclusive of her time was the grandest dame of all! Still more remarkable was a local article on Old Trinity, New York, in the columns of the *New York Herald*, in which the writer evidently intended to express himself in the most complimentary terms regarding this church, and he therefore described it as "the most wealthy and *exclusive* church in New York." But why "exclusive"? the average reader would inquire. Is the ministry of the gospel to be judged by a curious social standard that holds up *ex*clusiveness rather than *in*clusiveness as a cardinal virtue? And whom does it exclude? Is it the poor only who are excluded, because it is, as its chronicler describes, a "wealthy" church? Or is it the absolutely sinful and immoral who are excluded from the teaching of Him who declares that He came to save sinners? Or is it the ill-clad, or the ill-bred, or the people who, though sufficiently well-to-do and well-clad and well-bred, are still not "in society"? It would be interesting to learn just what people or class of people are excluded by an "exclusive" church. To be exclusive is to exclude. Now, the note of the day, in all its higher and nobler trend of thought, is to *in*clude, to share, to communicate.

[1] A. Maclaren.

Emerson has remarked that "exclusiveness excludes itself." All that we keep out we go without. If we admit no one we deprive ourselves of every one. If we admit a few, in order that we may lay that flattering unction of exclusiveness to our souls, we exclude the many. There is a great universal love which the world only dimly comprehends. There is a transcendent greatness of life into which every soul may and should enter. There is the joy of possessing, and the infinitely greater joy of sharing, all spiritual possessions. If you have greater knowledge, better manners, finer culture, do not exclude those who have less, but *in*clude and share, and thus find in it its divinest sweetness. Exclusiveness is the attribute of the barbarian, the savage, or the defective person. Why should it be affected by those whose greatest glory should lie in the inclusiveness of all human aid and human affections?[1]

3. Jonah was ordered to forsake his own people and be the first missionary to the heathen. Only by a noble submission and denial of his own will and his own wisdom could Jonah yield to the command of God; and only through a not less severe struggle against the Divine Spirit could the servant of Jehovah renounce a mission to which his Lord had called him. Of that inward conflict the Word of God says nothing; it only gives us the result of it, which is very sorrowful. We read: "But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord; and he went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord."

We behold the recreant prophet of the Lord, false to the high inspirations that sought to fill his heart, seeking shelter on board a ship that will bear him far away to a land where the name of Nineveh is unknown. In a little the sails are spread to a favouring breeze, "the ship was cheered, the harbour cleared," and the vessel is speeding its way "o'er the wild waste of waters." The prophet has turned his back alike upon his mission and upon his God.

¶ When we read Dr. Brooks' sermon on "Going up to Jerusalem" it seems to have a prophetic character, as though the preacher, in urging upon his hearers to gain some clearer perception of the appointed result toward which the steady

[1] Lilian Whiting, *The World Beautiful*, 71.

tendency of their lives was growing, was thinking and speaking of himself. Life was changing for him now to its last appointed phase. From this time his own face was set, like that of the Master before him, to go up to Jerusalem; and when friends remonstrated and would fain hold him back, he went steadily forward, and as they looked after him in his stride toward the end, they were amazed. "Do not pray for easy lives. Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers. Pray for powers equal to your tasks. If the life which you have chosen to be your life is really worthy of you, it involves self-sacrifice and pain. If your Jerusalem really is your sacred city, there is certainly a cross in it. Ask God to fill you with Himself, and then calmly look up and go on. Go up to Jerusalem expecting all things that are written concerning you to be fulfilled. Disappointment, mortification, misconception, enmity, pain, death, these may come to you, but if they come to you in doing your duty it is all right."[1]

4. Jonah did not suppose that he could literally escape from the presence of God. He did not suppose that there were corners in the universe, still less in the inhabited globe, from which the presence and power of its Maker are excluded. The words "from the presence of the Lord" should be rendered "from being before the Lord." It was not God's inevitable and encompassing presence, but his own sense of standing before Him as His servant and minister, from which Jonah fled. Distinguish between God's actual, matter-of-fact, unseen, but all-encompassing presence and our personal sense of it. From the former, escape is impossible; from the latter, it is, alas! only too easy. What Jonah wanted was a distraction that should relieve him from the sense of duty which belonged to his prophet-conscience, from those scruples which the mistaken patriot within him would fain have crushed. He would change the mental and spiritual atmosphere; he would turn his back on a country where all that met the eye spoke of the power and reality of the Sinaitic revelation; he would interest himself in human life, under other and different aspects; the language, the commerce, the customs, if not the religion, of the Spanish seaport might give a turn to his thoughts which would enable him to forget the past. So he "went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish."

[1] A. V. G. Allen, *Phillips Brooks: Memories of His Life*, 471.

¶ What most stands in the way of the performance of duty is irresolution, weakness of purpose, and indecision. On the one side are conscience and the knowledge of good and evil; on the other are indolence, selfishness, love of pleasure, or passion. The weak and ill-disciplined will may remain suspended for a time between these influences; but at length the balance inclines one way or the other, according as the will is called into action or otherwise. If it be allowed to remain passive, the lower influence of selfishness or passion will prevail; and thus manhood suffers abdication, individuality is renounced, character is degraded. . . . It was a noble saying of Pompey, when his friends tried to dissuade him from embarking for Rome in a storm, telling him that he did so at the great peril of his life: "It is necessary for me to go," he said; "it is not necessary for me to live." What it was right that he should do, he would do, in the face of danger and in defiance of storms.[1]

Deep in his meditative bower,
The tranquil seer reclined;
Numbering the creepers of an hour,
The gourds which o'er him twined.

To note each plant, to rear each fruit
Which soothes the languid sense,
He deem'd a safe, refined pursuit,—
His Lord, an indolence.

The sudden voice was heard at length,
"Lift thou the prophet's rod!"
But sloth had sapp'd the prophet's strength,
He fear'd, and fled from God.

Next, by a fearful judgment tamed,
He threats the offending race;
God spares;—he murmurs, pride-inflamed,
His threat made void by grace.

What?—pride and sloth! man's worst of foes!
And can such guests invade
Our choicest bliss, the green repose
Of the sweet garden-shade?[2]

[1] S. Smiles, *Character* (ed. 1874), 192.
[2] J. H. Newman, *Verses on Various Occasions.*

II.

The Divine Pursuit.

1. Onward towards the westering sun glides the Phœnician ship over the darkening waters. God's swift wind follows like a Nemesis invisible—such a Euroclydon as in a later day brought disaster to the ship of St. Paul in the same sea. The mighty waves, the "white horses" of the Mediterranean, lift their heads on high and shake their shaggy manes. Sails are torn to shreds, and the weather-beaten sailors, each tugging at his straining oar, are in their places battling for dear life. Jonah accepts no responsibility. He has gone down into the sides of the ship and lies fast asleep. Courage can rest unmoved on the brink of a precipice; and callous indifference can surely do the like. The recalcitrant prophet, in his pitiless eagerness to let Nineveh be destroyed, has ceased to regard his own little life, and while every bronzed heathen calls in piercing tones of desperation for the intervention of his god, the messenger of Jehovah sleeps.

Over against this picture of the insensible prophet, all unaware of the storm (which may suggest the parallel insensibility of Israel to the impending Divine judgments), is set the behaviour of the heathen sailors, or "salts," as the story calls them. Their conduct is part of the lesson of the book; for, heathen as they are, they have yet a sense of dependence, and they pray; they are full of courage, battling with the storm, jettisoning the cargo, and doing everything possible to save the ship. While thus employed, they come upon the sleeping figure of the prophet in the hold. It seemed strange that there should be one man in that storm-tossed vessel who should be ignorant or careless of their impending ruin. It seemed like wilfully neglecting one more chance of safety. Among the multiplicity of gods in whom they believed it might perchance be the god of this nameless stranger who would ultimately interfere on their behalf. The shipmaster came and said to him, "What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not." But notwithstanding their prayers the tempest increased, and they were in imminent danger of being shipwrecked and drowned.

With the superstition of their time, their race, and their

occupation, they conclude that some one on board has offended the gods. Recourse is promptly had to divination, and the lot falls on Jonah. Then Jonah is awakened indeed. He knows that he is trying to evade the Divine command laid upon him, and he tells them so. At this the sailors are filled with deadly terror. They ask him what sacrifice will be likely to appease his God. He answers gloomily enough, "Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you." Then follows a very fine touch. Good sailors that they were, they would struggle against that dreadful necessity which Jonah laid upon them. They would not, if they could help it, hurl their passenger to certain death. They strike for land; they work with prodigious efforts. But it is of no avail. The sea rises higher and higher; and with trembling hands, praying the while to be held guiltless of their deed in thus being involuntarily the instruments of the vengeance of this awful God of Israel, they cast the victim into the sea. Immediately the rage of the storm ceases, and the awe-struck ship's company worship Jehovah.

¶ It is the fashion for modern novelists to talk freely of Fate as though Fate "kept the bank" and men were impotent. Mr. Hardy says: "The President of the Immortals had ended his sport with Tess." Such pagans humiliate manhood before the twin-god of Fortune and Destiny. Huxley said that every man is set down at the chess-board to contend with a player who is invisible. Every move you make is beyond recall. You are matched against an antagonist who is remorselessly just. Play but one pawn badly, and you must abide by the consequences throughout the rest of the game. You have to do with pitiless laws, and, do what you will, you must inevitably be beaten by your invisible opponent. But why does not Huxley rather show that it is not a pitiless foe with whom you contend but a friend, that life lends itself to the gain of a wise and faithful man, that, though our days are limited, we may win the match by conquering adverse circumstances and mastering ourselves, and so may win the real prize to be plucked out of the game?[1]

2. Jonah's conduct in the storm is no less noble than his former conduct had been base. The burst of the tempest blew away all the fog from his mind, and he saw the stars again. His confession of faith, his calm conviction that he was the cause of

[1] R. E. Welsh, *Man to Man*, 71.

the storm, his quiet, unhesitating command to throw him into the wild chaos foaming about the ship, his willing acceptance of death as the wages of his sin, all tell how true a saint he was in the depth of his soul.

That storm is Jonah's deliverance—his deliverance from delusion. It brings him a message—the very message he needs. Its voice is to him the voice of God. Long before his salvation from the outward shipwreck, he is saved from the shipwreck of his inner life. The storm makes a man of him, a missionary of him. His missionary spirit took fire on the spot. Are these heathen sailors to die on *his* account? Is not he the aggressor, the delinquent? Is it not for him that the storm has been sent? Is it not he that has brought discredit on this foreign ship? Is it not he that should atone? He calls upon the sailors to throw him into the sea—to purchase their peace by his sacrifice. That call is the finest thing in the picture. It is the real miracle. It marks the enlargement of the man. It implies a transformation akin to that of Saul of Tarsus. The greatest marvel is not Jonah's escape from the waves, but Jonah's immersion in the waves—his immersion at his own desire. He could ask to be thrown into that element of death only by reason of the fact that he had already entered into an element of larger life, an environment in which his Jewish nature had recognized the common need of man.

¶ The human heart so naturally yearns to offer itself up that we have only to meet along our pathway some one who, doubting neither himself nor us, demands it without reserve, and we yield it to him at once. Reason may understand a partial gift, a transient devotion; the heart knows only the entire sacrifice, and, like the lover to his beloved, it says to its vanquisher, "Thine alone and forever." That which has caused the miserable failure of all the efforts of natural religion is that its founders have not had the courage to lay hold upon the hearts of men, consenting to no partition. They have not understood the imperious desire for immolation which lies in the depths of every soul.[1]

3. Through the imposture of sin the prophet had fallen into immeasurable anguish and misery, and if God had not had mercy upon him, he would have perished in eternal despair. And as it

[1] Paul Sabatier, *Life of St. Francis of Assisi*, 72.

was, things came to a terrible pass with him. For before he could be restored to fellowship with his God, he had to be brought into the depths of humiliation. He had proudly sought to flee from the presence of God, and would fain have saved himself from Him; now he must be cast out among the refuse and sweepings of the world.

Now comes the marvel. God has prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah, and at the moment he is flung overboard into the yeast of waves this singular protector engulfs him alive. In the fish Jonah prays to God. The psalm inserted at this stage of the story is really the thanksgiving of a man who has been saved from drowning, and it is not easy to see its suitability to the fearful position in which the prophet is supposed to utter it. Still the idea is that his peril and his deliverance bring him to a better mind. Jonah turns to God and God delivers him. All things fulfil the purposes of God. As the mariners had surrendered the miscreant to justice, so the sea monster surrenders the penitent to mercy, and on the third day Jonah finds himself once more breathing upon the land.

To the writer of the tale, as to every religious Hebrew, these were the very simplest truths. The whole universe was ever in God's hands to be dealt with exactly as He pleased. When it was necessary, He could send forth a great wind into the sea to bar Jonah's passage across the western waves; with equal ease He could "prepare" a great fish to receive the prophet when he disappeared beneath their surface. Both the wind and the fish came from the immediate presence of God. The broad distinction which we draw between the natural and the supernatural was unknown to the Hebrew mind. The hand of God was to be traced alike in the simplest natural events and in the most amazing marvels. The whole story of the fish is indeed merely a part of the framework of the narrative, and does not call for very special attention. It is intended that this should be directed rather upon the religious ideas which form its essence.

¶ Mohammed in the Koran has caught the inner meaning of this passage when he says, "If Jonah had not praised God, verily he would have remained in the belly of the great fish till the day of resurrection." But in his praising God the education of the prophet was finished. God had made him feel even in the midst

of his narrow prejudices and petty bigotries that, were it not for that very mercy in which he did not wish the Ninevites to share, he himself would have but small chance of experiencing the Divine favour. There was need for repentance, for mercy, if not for Nineveh, at least for himself. Learning to sympathize with God in this, he was taught also to sympathize with Him in that. In being himself repentant and pardoned, he learned to feel for those whom God sought to bring to repentance and pardon.[1]

¶ Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* is strangely parallel to the story of Jonah. The sin of the Ancient Mariner was the same as his, hatred and cruelty to God's creatures, typified in his case by the shooting of the albatross, in Jonah's by his hatred of the heathen. Both voyages were unfortunate, and the day came when the Ancient Mariner was reduced to the depths of despair. Only through repentance, through a reviving love within his heart towards God's creatures, could the weight of the curse upon his soul begin to lighten. The moment came when looking over the ship's side he saw the creatures moving in the deep.

> O happy living things! no tongue
> Their beauty might declare:
> A spring of love gushed from my heart,
> And I blessed them unaware:
> Sure my kind saint took pity on me,
> And I blessed them unaware.

And mark what followed!

> The self-same moment I could pray;
> And from my neck so free
> The Albatross fell off, and sank
> Like lead into the sea.[2]

4. Jonah saved, and once more on land, is immediately sent to discharge the original God-given duty from which he had fled. His deliverance and second commission are put as if all but simultaneous, and his obedience was swift and glad. He did not venture to take for granted that the charge which he had shirked was still continued to him. If God commands us to take the trumpet, and we refuse, we dare not assume that we shall still be honoured with the delivery of the message. The punishment of dumb lips is often dumbness. Opportunities of service slothfully or faint-

[1] G. D. Macnaughtan, *Two Hebrew Idylls*, 150. [2] *Ibid.* 147.

heartedly neglected are often withdrawn. We can fancy how Jonah, brought back to the better mind which breathes in his psalm, longed to be honoured with the trust of preaching once more, and how rapturously his spirit would address itself to the task. Duties once unwelcome become sweet when we have passed through the experience of the misery that comes from neglecting them. It is God's mercy that gives us the opportunity of effacing past disobedience by new alacrity.

¶ Gifts are given to trade withal for God. Opportunities are the market-days for that trade. To napkin up the one and to let slip the other will end in trouble and disconsolation. Disquietments and perplexities of heart are worms that will certainly breed in the rust of unexercised gifts. God loseth a revenue of glory and honour by such slothful souls; and He will make them sensible of it. I know some at this day whom omissions of opportunities for service are ready to sink into the grave.[1]

III.

Jonah's Preaching and its Result.

Jonah, at last obedient, fulfils his mission. Nineveh, then the chief city of the heathen world, is startled by his voice proclaiming its speedy overthrow. From street to street this first, unwilling, apostle to the Gentiles goes, his piercing utterances and wild cries ringing through the city. There is nowhere else any hint of the strange scenes that follow. No outward sign of doom appears; no comet blazes; no ghosts walk the streets; no foe is at the gates. But at the word of that lonely stranger remorse for the wrong and violence of generations is awakened universally. The king is affected, and in penitence proclaims a fast and a general mourning. The king himself sits in ashes, and issues a mandate that all shall pray and repent; the very animals are to be clothed in mourning. All Nineveh repents at the first summons, before Jonah has accomplished his mission, before, even, he has gone through the whole city. No preaching before or since ever produced such results. Is it wonderful that with such contrition the Divine pity was aroused, and that God revoked His

[1] John Owen.

decree of ruin? Jonah has done his God-given work despite himself.

¶ Contrition, in a more or less perfect form, is to be found at the very beginning of the spiritual life of all who have ever sinned deeply. It is its first movement, that which causes it to say, "I will arise." It is the first thought that breaks in upon the soul as it awakens to the sense of its sin. Where the sense of sin is not, the spiritual life cannot exist; as the life of holiness grows, the spirit of contrition deepens. It seems strange, but it is undoubtedly true, that contrition deepens in proportion as the guilt of sin is removed. There is nothing that contrition will not dare. She will strive after the virtues that seem to belong only to those who have been always kept pure. Despair cannot exist where she is, nor timidity. She is the life and centre of all the soul's progress. So clear is her own vision of God, so certain is she of her own love, that she can encourage and sustain the soul in times of utmost darkness and deadness.[1]

IV.

Jonah's Displeasure and its Rebuke.

1. The Jonah of the last chapter becomes again the Jonah of the earlier portion of the book. The prophet who fled to Tarshish had been temporarily recalled to a better mind by God's great mercy to him. He had asked the people of Nineveh to choose between repentance and destruction. And the people of Nineveh had chosen in such a way as to please God, but not in such a way as to please Jonah.

The psychology of Jonah at this point is exceedingly interesting. There was a little, perhaps, of the pique of the prophet at seeing his prophecies unfulfilled. He had been denouncing the Ninevites with all his might; he had got them to listen to him; he had enjoyed the dread which his awful denunciations excited; he had looked forward to his personal triumph when the proud city sank into ruin; now all that he had predicted was to be falsified, and he would probably be jeered at by those in Nineveh, and certainly such there were who had laughed all along at his predictions as the ravings of a madman. It was a sorry plight for a

[1] B. W. Maturin, *Some Principles and Practices of the Spiritual Life.*

prophet, and Jonah smarted under the humiliation. "It displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry." Part of his anger was due to his Hebrew patriotism. He had delivered his message, but with no kindness in his heart towards the Ninevites. It would have been joy to Jonah to see Jehovah avenging Himself on His adversaries, inflicting upon them a punishment so terrible, so complete, that it should make all the other nations pallid with fear, and be a salutary warning to every hostile people never more to sully the soil of Jehovah's land with impious, invading feet. And now Jehovah Himself deprives him of this fierce patriotic satisfaction, and Jehovah Himself rebukes him with the question: "Doest thou well to be angry?"

Jonah was thinking of himself; God was thinking of Nineveh. Jonah was thinking of his prophetic reputation, his official dignity; God was thinking, in His magnanimity, how He might be gracious yet to Nineveh, to her people, to her children, and even to her cattle! Jonah was thinking of the greatly impressive demonstration of his own eminence as a prophet. But in the Divine Nature there is no pride of office to be considered; God—as we read of our Lord Christ—"counts it no prize to be God."

¶ A minister's humility is the crown and jewel of his ministry. It is a great deal easier to grow proud of the thoroughness and faithfulness with which you hold a doctrine than of the completeness with which you understand Christ. The doctrine you may squeeze so small that you can hold it all in your hand and feel that you have comprehended it. The Divine Saviour, we know, however we may talk competently of Him, is past our comprehension, wiser, dearer, truer than we have begun to know. Your pride in doctrine requires a doctor wiser and more orthodox than you to shake it. Your pride in Christ any poor saint nearer to Him than you have ever dreamed of being, or some wretched beggar bringing Him in some new shape of appealing misery to your weak love, may overturn in a moment. "The man is thrice welcome to whom my Lord has reprimanded me," said Mohammed one day most nobly, but he said it not of a theologian who had beaten him in argument, but of a blind wretch whose supplication he had rejected, and thereby learned how far he still was from God. If you want to protect your religious pride, make your religion consist in knowing truth. If you want to be humble in your religion, make your religion begin and end in knowing Christ.[1]

[1] Phillips Brooks, *Essays and Addresses*, 58.

2. There, on the hill-slope, sat Jonah watching the busy hive of humanity swarming at his feet. His thunder-cry of warning had made a fearful flutter, had brought the city to repentance, and had extorted from them all, from king to beggar, the cry of prayer. To screen himself from the fierce rays of the burning sun, Jonah reared a rude booth, or shanty, from such scanty materials as were within his reach. There he sat, only thinly screened from the scorching rays, and with a hotter fire of jealousy and anger burning at his heart. What the prophet had foreboded now rose in all its reality before his eyes. While, as a whole, the people of Israel despised the word of God, the heathen had willingly received it; while the judgments of God were falling ever more fearfully on the chosen people, the sun of His grace seemed to be shining now with all its brightness and blessing upon a heathen people.

Thus it was not bloodthirstiness, or a cruel and callous heart, that made Jonah wish for the destruction of Nineveh; it was the conviction that, if the heathen city were spared, his own people would be crushed. This thought pierced his heart with an infinite sorrow. In his vexation and bitterness he felt, like Elijah, that life was no longer worth living.

¶ "More than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left," the Prophet had desired to see sacrificed to his preconceived notion of the necessities of a logical theory, or to the destruction of his country's enemies. Better (so it has often been said by Jonah's successors) to die than that unbaptized infants should be saved—than that the reprobate should repent—than that God's threatenings should ever be revoked—than that the solemnity of life should be disturbed by the restoration of the thousands who have had no opportunity of knowing the Divine will—than that God should at last "be all in all." He sat under the shadow of his booth, still hoping, believing for the worst, "till he might see what would become of the city."

Most just was the application of this passage by an apostolic pastor [Fletcher of Madeley] to the harsh Calvinists of the eighteenth century: "Get ye from under your parched gourd of 'reprobation'; let not your eye be evil because God is good; nor fret, like Jonah, because the Father of mercies extends His compassion even to all the humbled heathen of the great city of Nineveh." And not to Calvinists only, but to all who would

sacrifice the cause of humanity to some professional or theological difficulty, is the startling truth addressed, "Doest thou well to be angry? God repented of the evil that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not." The foredoomed destruction of the wicked, the logical consistency of the prophet's teaching, must go for nothing before the justice and "the great kindness" of God—before the claims even of the unconscious heathen children, of the repentant heathen king.[1]

3. Jonah's inhumanity is straightway rebuked. The style of the rebuke is as pictorial and ideal as the previous scenes of the story. A broad-leaved gourd grows up in a night, and he rejoices in its shelter from the sun. But God sends a worm which gnaws the gourd-stem. The next day it is withered, and Jonah is scorched by the noonday blaze till he faints and begs for death. But the Divine patience pities even this hard and intractable pupil, and reprimands him only with the still small voice of gentle remonstrance: "Thou hast had pity on the gourd, and should not I have pity on Nineveh, that great city," its guiltless children, its dumb cattle?

¶ One of Principal Rainy's daughters writes: "To us he was just 'Father.' I suppose most children begin by thinking their father the most wise and strong and tender of beings, and with us that went on to the very end, with an always increasing sense of how unusual such wisdom and strength and tenderness were. For myself, it is to him I owe all my earliest ideas of what the Fatherhood of God might mean. They all came translated to me so inevitably, so securely, through that dear and familiar medium that never once failed me all my life—never once came short of my hopes or my needs. And it was so with us all. I remember how a sister once wrote to me, 'I know you read the thirteenth verse of the 103rd Psalm as I do—Like as *my* Father pitieth his children'—and that means just everything."[2]

4. What followed—what effect the Divine rebuke had upon the prophet, what became of him—is all unsaid. The effect is that of a striking tableau on which the curtain drops. The prophet appears, in all his discontent at the wideness of God's mercy in admitting the heathen to His grace, just long enough for us to hear the Divine voice correcting his selfish thoughtlessness, and

[1] A. P. Stanley, *History of the Jewish Church*, ii. 304.
[2] P. Carnegie Simpson, *The Life of Principal Rainy*, ii. 93.

then vanishes utterly. What a world of meaning reverberates in those parting words of the Spirit of goodness—"and also much cattle"—in which the wants of the whole brute creation are shown dwelling in the compassionate remembrance of their Maker, equally with the wants of His elect servants! What emphasis is given to this protest of mercy against inhumanity by the sudden close while these words of pity are left ringing in our ears! So dramatic an effect cannot have been accidental. The book ends because its object is accomplished, and its lesson taught.

¶ At night we returned to the Taj, which we saw by splendid moonlight, in company with the Maharajah of Bhurtpur, who tells me that he still keeps up the preserve mentioned in a passage of my *Notes of an Indian Journey*:

"Later in the day, I asked another person about the woodland in which the *Pilu* was growing. 'It is,' said he, 'a preserve of the Maharajah's.' 'Does he shoot?' I asked. 'No,' was the reply; 'he thinks it wrong to take life, and never shoots. When he sees cattle overworked on the road, he buys them and puts them in there to live happily ever afterwards,' holding, apparently, to the good maxim of Jehangeer, 'that a monarch should care even for the beasts of the field, and that the very birds of heaven should receive their due at the foot of the throne.'"[1]

5. Jonah was the typical bigot of all ages. He believed the Jewish Church was the only Church, and that there was no salvation outside it for any Gentile. Yet he was a very good man. Read his prayer in the third chapter; and there is no higher test of genuine piety and devoutness than prayer. No ungodly man could have composed a prayer like that. He was a true prophet, and was recognized as such by Christ Himself. So we ought to be taught that deep personal piety often exists with extreme and most anti-Christian bigotry.

John Calvin is certainly correct when he says that Jonah had far more respect to his own reputation as a prophet of the Divine judgment to Nineveh than he had either to the good of Nineveh or to the glory of God. But Jonah was not a false prophet. He was a good man, who would, however, limit God's love and mercy to his own nation. And God sought to enlarge his vision, and moved his sympathy by wounding him in his most

[1] Sir M. E. Grant Duff, *Notes from a Diary, 1881–1886*, ii. 102.

vulnerable point, his self-love. The prophet is taught to look beyond the foreign policy of his petty nation; he is no longer the mouthpiece of the Northern or the Southern tribes, but the envoy of Jehovah, whose purpose fulfils itself in many peoples and whose love embraces all mankind. Jewish exclusiveness and bigotry are rebuked; mutual toleration and respect are taught by this story.

¶ At the funeral service of the Archbishop, the Primate (Dr. Alexander) who gave the address, laid stress upon the entire absence of bigotry that marked the late Prelate. "He united," said the Primate, "intense religious conviction with a beautiful, a wonderful toleration. It is easy to be tolerant when we are latitudinarian; easy to make a present of that which we do not value. Toleration is a shabby gift when it costs us nothing. But for a man who loves his principles passionately to pause and try to understand his opponent thoroughly, to shield his adversary from the immoderate zeal of his own partisans—still more, to think over his opponent's ideas until he finds that there is an aspect of them under which they appear greatly better than at first they seemed, and thus to become able to afford them hospitality in his own soul—this is the history of good men who can say, 'Grace be with all them who love our Lord Jesus in sincerity.'"[1]

[1] F. D. How, *Archbishop Plunket: A Memoir*, 380.

MICAH.

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MICAH.

Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy.—Mic. vii. 18.

1. THE Book of Micah lies sixth of the Twelve Prophets in the Hebrew Canon, but in the order of the Septuagint third, following Amos and Hosea. The latter arrangement was doubtless directed by the size of the respective books; in the case of Micah it has coincided with the prophet's proper chronological position. Though his exact date is not certain, he seems to have been the youngest of a remarkable group of four, Amos and Hosea being his two immediate predecessors in the Northern Kingdom, and Isaiah his great contemporary in Judah.

While Isaiah's home was the capital, Micah was a native of a small town in the maritime plain, Moresheth, a dependency of Gath. The difference of position and surroundings is marked in the writings of the two prophets. Isaiah writes as one acquainted with the society and manners of the capital; Micah speaks as a "man of the people," who sympathized with the peasantry in their sufferings; and he attacks, not indeed with greater boldness than Isaiah, but with greater directness and in more scathing terms, the wrongs to which they were exposed at the hands of the nobles and rich proprietors of Judah. Further, while Isaiah evinces a keen interest in the political movements of the time, Micah appears almost exclusively as an ethical and religious teacher; he mentions, indeed, the Assyrians, but as a mere foe, not as a power which might tempt his countrymen to embark upon a perilous political enterprise, and he raises no warning voice against the danger to Judah of Egyptian influence.

In Micah, therefore, we get a picture of the period supplementing that given by Isaiah, viewed from the standpoint not so much of the statesman in the capital as of the peasant in the

village. Unlike Isaiah, too, who promised inviolable security to Zion, he foretold the destruction of Jerusalem, and so anticipated Jeremiah by a century. It is probable that the religious reformation in Hezekiah's reign was largely due to the preaching of that mighty prophet who wrought a repentance greater than his great contemporary Isaiah.

2. The Book of Micah presents serious critical difficulties to the student. The matter is not helped by the great divergence of opinion of the best scholars. In the absence of definite data it is impossible to reach a conclusion that would gain general acceptance, but we may here make a few broad statements.

All critics are practically agreed as to the presence of interpolations in the text, as well as to the occurrence of certain verses of the prophet out of their proper order. This indeed must be obvious to every careful reader as he notes the somewhat frequent break in the logical sequence, especially of chaps. iv. and v. All critics, too, admit the authenticity of chaps. i.–iii., with the possible exception of ii. 12, 13; while a majority hold that chaps. vi. and vii., whether by Micah or not, must be assigned to the reign of Manasseh. On the authenticity of chaps. iv. and v.—minus interpolations—and of chaps. vi. and vii. opinion is divided, but we ought not to overlook the remarkable fact that those who have recently written the fullest monographs on Micah incline to believe in the genuineness of the book as a whole. While it is not likely that such different messages as those of chaps. i.–iii. and chaps. iv.–v. would be uttered in direct succession, it is wholly probable that they would spring from the varied prospect of two distinct periods of the prophet's life. When the student calls to mind the long period of years during which we know that Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Micah were active, and notes the compact report of the prophetic addresses of all those years, he is forced to conclude that the writings to which we have access are but a representative digest of the actual utterances. The words were probably not taken down on the spot as spoken, but reproduced from memory either by the prophet himself or by a faithful disciple. The writing is an accurate reproduction of the force and tenor of the original saying, but not necessarily a word-for-word repetition

of it. What Jeremiah did, as related in the thirty-sixth chapter of the Book of Jeremiah, throws much light upon this question. He was told to write down upon a roll "all the words that I have spoken unto thee against Israel, and against Judah, and against all the nations, from the day I spake unto thee, from the days of Josiah, even unto this day"; that is, for twenty-three years. In the present Book of Jeremiah that roll would be represented by about a dozen chapters, which in turn record the sermons of twice as many years. Manifestly, one discourse will often sum up the distinctive ideas of a whole season of active preaching.

3. The Book of Micah has been described as uniting the pessimism of Amos with the Messianic optimism of the second Zechariah. Certainly no prophet proclaimed the Messianic hope more distinctly or in more glowing language. It is not very easy to do justice to his literary qualities. We miss perhaps the majestic dignity of Isaiah, the dramatic power of the great prophet of the Exile, the sympathetic wailing of Jeremiah, the stern passion of Amos, and the tenderness of Hosea; and yet, supposing the book is, on the whole, the work of one prophet, he has something of all these. The most striking traits, perhaps, are moral earnestness and a patriotic interest in his people. His ideas, bold and lofty, are coloured like those of Amos with rich imagery drawn from rural life. In the solemn colloquy of vi. 1–8 we have one of the most beautiful and tender passages in the whole of Old Testament literature.

The book falls naturally into three parts, the existence of which has long been recognized. They are differentiated from each other by their contents, tone, and point of view, and to some extent by their poetic form. Chaps. i.–iii. contain almost exclusively denunciations of sin and proclamations of approaching punishment; chaps. iv. and v. are devoted almost as exclusively to words of hope and cheer; while chaps. vi. and vii. combine these two elements.

I.

Divine Judgment.

And I said, Hear, I pray you, ye heads of Jacob, and rulers of the house of Israel: is it not for you to know judgement? who hate the good, and love the evil; who pluck off their skin from off them, and their flesh from off their bones; who also eat the flesh of my people; and they flay their skin from off them, and break their bones; yea, they chop them in pieces, as for the pot, and as flesh within the caldron.—Mic. iii. 1-3.

Some time in the reign of Hezekiah, when the kingdom of Judah was still inviolate, but shivering to the shock of the fall of Samaria, and probably while Sargon the destroyer was pushing his way past Judah to meet Egypt at Raphia, Micah, standing in sight of the Assyrian march, attacked the sins of his people and prophesied their speedy overthrow beneath the same flood of war. The exact year was probably 720–719 B.C. Amos had been silent thirty years, Hosea hardly fifteen; Isaiah was in the midway of his career.

1. The prophet begins by describing, in impressive imagery, the approaching manifestation of Jehovah for judgment, on account of the transgression of the two kingdoms, which is centred in their respective capitals, Samaria and Jerusalem. In the first instance, Micah declares the impending ruin of Samaria. The evil does not, however, rest there; he sees it advancing upon Jerusalem as well, and utters his wail of lament as the vision of disaster meets his eye. To Micah as well as to Isaiah Jerusalem was dear, and his subsequent prediction of her overthrow ought to be read with the accent of this previous mourning for her peril. Nevertheless his heart clings most to his own home, and, while Isaiah pictures the Assyrian entering Judah from the north by Migron, Michmash and Nob, Micah anticipates invasion by the opposite gateway of the land, at the door of his own village. His elegy sweeps across the landscape so dear to him. This obscure province was, even more than Jerusalem, his world, the world of his heart. It gives us a living interest in the man that the fate of these small villages, many of them vanished, should excite in him more passion than the fortunes of Zion herself. In such a passion we can incarnate his

spirit. Micah is no longer a book, or an oration, but flesh and blood upon a home and a countryside of his own. We see him on his house-top pouring forth his words before the hills and the far-stretching heathen land. In the name of every village within sight he reads a symbol of the curse that is coming upon his country, and of the sins that have earned the curse.

¶ One quality of the Hebrew Prophets' ideal of national religion is their strong conscience of their people's sins and civic duties. This is the harder and the more misunderstood half of patriotism. The ears of every people are open to the celebration of its history as Divine, and even the baser hearts among it may be flattered by the idea of its mission to the world. But the true test of national religion is sensitiveness to the national sins. This was the test between the false and the true prophet in Israel; it is our test as preachers to our own day. Is our office servile to the pride and material interests of our nation? Or do we feel with trembling that the ethical element in patriotism is, in the strong tumult of all the others, the most easily neglected, and therefore the most in need of emphasis by a people's prophets? For its sake and God's the true patriot must sometimes run counter to the currents of popular enthusiasms, and be willing to incur the charges of treason to the commonwealth, and of cowardice in face of the national destiny. We have nothing to dread from that fear of kings which once made so many prophets false; but we have all the more to watch that we do not become flatterers of the common people. If we are to defend their rights, we must be brave to declare their sins; the offices of the Prophet and of the Demagogue are absolutely irreconcilable.[1]

2. After announcing the Divine judgment upon Samaria and Judah, Micah goes on to state the reasons for the judgment. Isaiah's work as a social reformer had met with scant success. Unable even to prevent Ahaz and the people from entering into alliance with Tiglath-pileser, he had, in the main, given himself for the last dozen years to the instruction of his disciples. The social wrongs, which he had first attacked, became more and more marked. Misuse of power, indifference to the claims of human brotherhood, and wanton luxury, characterized the daily life of the city. To Micah, the villager, the unjust treatment of the helpless poor by men of wealth and power is the sin that cries aloud to

[1] G. A. Smith, *Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament*, 270.

Heaven. The prophet portrays a social and economic situation in Judah very similar to that of Samaria as described by Amos in the years immediately preceding the overthrow of the Northern Kingdom. A degenerate aristocracy, mastered by greed and fattening upon tyranny, makes life unbearable for the tiller of the soil and the wage-earner. The possession of wealth is looked upon as the *summum bonum*; nothing may stand in the way of its attainment. The ordinary demands of justice and righteousness are trampled under foot. The quality of mercy is swallowed up in avarice. The custodians and administrators of law abuse their powers. Justice is for sale to the highest bidder. Under due process of law widows and orphans are expelled from their ancestral homes, that a few acres may be added to the estate of the neighbouring landlord. In the lust for wealth, the substance and sustenance of the poor are devoured, so that they are reduced to the lowest depths of misery and degradation. Even the sacraments and consolations of religion are on the market; priests and prophets cater to the rich and browbeat the poor.

¶ You cannot but have noticed how often in those parts of the Bible which are likely to be oftenest opened when people look for guidance, comfort, or help in the affairs of daily life—namely, the Psalms and Proverbs—mention is made of the guilt attaching to the *Oppression* of the poor. Observe: not the neglect of them, but the *Oppression* of them: the word is as frequent as it is strange. You can hardly open either of those books, but somewhere in their pages you will find a description of the wicked man's attempts against the poor: such as—"He doth ravish the poor when he getteth him into his net."

"He sitteth in the lurking places of the villages; his eyes are privily set against the poor."

"In his pride he doth persecute the poor, and blesseth the covetous, whom God abhorreth."

"His mouth is full of deceit and fraud; in the secret places doth he murder the innocent. Have the workers of iniquity no knowledge, who eat up my people as they eat bread? They have drawn out the sword, and bent the bow, to cast down the poor and needy."

Now, do we ever ask ourselves what the real meaning of these passages may be, and who these wicked people are who are "murdering the innocent"? You know it is rather singular language, this!—rather strong language, we might, perhaps, call it

—hearing it for the first time. Murder! and murder of innocent people!—nay, even a sort of cannibalism. Eating people,—yes, and God's people, too—eating *My* people as if they were bread! swords drawn, bows bent, poison of serpents mixed! violence of hands weighed, measured, and trafficked with as so much coin!—where is all this going on? Do you suppose it was only going on in the time of David, and that nobody but Jews ever murder the poor? If so, it would surely be wiser not to mutter and mumble for our daily lessons what does not concern us; but if there be any chance that it may concern us, and if this description, in the Psalms, of human guilt is at all generally applicable, as the descriptions in the Psalms of human sorrow are, may it not be advisable to know wherein this guilt is being committed round about us, or by ourselves? and when we take the words of the Bible into our mouths in a congregational way, to be sure whether we mean merely to chant a piece of melodious poetry relating to other people—(we know not exactly to whom)—or to assert our belief in facts bearing somewhat stringently on ourselves and our daily business. And if you make up your minds to do this no longer, and take pains to examine into the matter, you will find that these strange words, occurring as they do, not in a few places only, but almost in every alternate psalm and every alternate chapter of proverb or prophecy, with tremendous reiteration, were not written for one nation or one time only, but for all nations and languages, for all places and all centuries; and it is as true of the wicked man now as ever it was of Nabal or Dives, that "his eyes are set against the poor."[1]

3. In the opening verses of Micah's prophecy there is manifested something both of severity and of sympathy, loyalty to God and pity for man. We have first a powerful description of coming judgment given by one who sees the storm approaching; then in the eighth verse there seems to be a sudden revulsion, an outburst of personal feeling, "For this will I wail and howl, I will go stripped and naked." The prophets do not write or speak as logicians or systematic theologians, but as men whose passion expresses itself in poetic forms; consequently they paint their pictures with strong light and deep shade, the transitions are abrupt, they pass quickly from one mood to another. The startling change is especially instructive in the case of Micah, a man whose mood is grim, whose attacks upon evil-doers are rude

[1] Ruskin, *Two Paths*, § 179 (*Works*, xvi. 397).

and realistic. Read the sublime theophany, study the picture of Jehovah coming to judgment riding upon the high places of the earth, so that the hills are melted and the valleys cleft. How real this is to the prophet! He sees it by the eye of faith; he knows that it must be, because God is righteous; he acquiesces in it and seems to rejoice in it, so strong is his sympathy with the justice of God, but when he realizes all that it means for the doomed land he utters the mournful cry, "For this will I wail and howl." What is the explanation of the abrupt transition? It is not merely because it means pain to himself, loss and distress to the district in which he lived. "For her wounds are incurable; for it is come even to Judah; it reacheth unto the gate of my people, even to Jerusalem." Neither is it simply grief and personal bitterness that the people have rejected his message and scorned his ministry. That these considerations enter as elements into the case there is no need to deny. Micah, if we take the first three chapters of this book as a decisive specimen of his work, does not seem to be a man of the sensitive emotional style of Hosea and Jeremiah; there is a plainness and roughness about his fibre, but it is just because of this that he shows most clearly that he has grasped the twofold life which is essential to real prophetic ministry—the vision of Divine judgment, and sympathy with sin-stricken, sorrowful men. He is on the side of God; through conviction of the Divine righteousness he enters into the secret of judgment, but what he sees is so awful that he swings round to the side of men, and goes into mourning for their woe. At the very time, it may be, that the world is making merry, that the Church is gay in her festival attire, the weird figure of the prophet comes across the scene preaching judgment and manifesting pity. This change from sternness to sympathy is not weakness or inconsistency, it is real prophetic strength; this spirit is the source of power with God, and influence over men; the prophet, because he has been so near to God, is driven close to the heart of humanity. In the case of Micah, with his fierce denunciation of wicked rulers, we are in danger of forgetting this, and we may be tempted to think of him as a raving demagogue. Hence it is important to emphasize the fact that he has in his own form that twofold outlook and double spirit which is the essence of the deepest religious experience,

the noblest spiritual life. The prophet speaks for God, but he speaks from within the circle of human life, not as a cold outsider.

¶ Our sympathy with men is the direct result of our union with Christ. The first bond of the Christian life is that between our souls and Christ. And upon the strength of that first bond will depend the kind of spirit we show to men. I want to put this quite clearly, because it is the point which distinguishes the true Christian sympathy from every other kind. There are other kinds of sympathy in the world; for example, the instinctive sympathy of the human heart which goes out to a fellow-man in his need. But let that sympathy meet with any rebuff, let it encounter opposition or misunderstanding or ingratitude, and it soon tires and withdraws in disgust. How many times have we heard a saying something like this: "My sympathy was thrown away. I shall never give it again"? Well, the true Christian sympathy can never speak in tones like that. For it does not depend upon men's attitude to itself. It is based upon the love of Christ. We do all for His sake, and so long as the bond between ourselves and Christ remains firm and strong, so long are we under the obligation to show sympathy towards men whatever may be their attitude to us. Our sympathy may be taken advantage of. We may be cheated and deceived. But as surely as we turn to Christ we hear His command to show that same spirit again. Our sympathy is not allowed to tire or fail. It is fed continually from Him.[1]

4. Micah's words of denunciation are terribly strong, but there have been many other ages and civilizations than his own of which they have been no more than true. "They crop us," said a French peasant of the lords of the great Louis' time, "as the sheep crops grass." Is there nothing of the same with ourselves? While Micah spoke, he had wasted lives and bent backs before him. His speech is elliptic till you see his finger pointing at them. Pinched peasant faces peer between all his words and fill the ellipses. And among the living poor to-day are there not starved and bitten faces—bodies with the blood sucked from them, with the Divine image crushed out of them? We cannot explain all of these by vice. Drunkenness and unthrift do account for much; but how much more is explicable only by the following facts. Many men among us are able to live in fashionable streets

[1] S. M. Berry, *Graces of the Christian Character*, 121.

and keep their families comfortable only by paying their employees a wage upon which it is impossible for men to be strong or women to be virtuous. Are such employers not using them as their food? They tell us that if they are to give higher wages they must close their business, and cease paying wages at all; and they are right, if they themselves continue to live on the scale they do. As long as many families are maintained in comfort by the profits of businesses in which some or all of the employees work for less than they can nourish and repair their bodies upon, the simple fact is that the one set are feeding upon the other set. It may be inevitable, it may be the fault of the system and not of the individual, it may be that to break up the system would mean to make things worse than ever, but all the same the truth is clear that many families of the middle class, and some of the very wealthiest of the land, are nourished by the waste of the lives of the poor.

¶ Among the most remarkable of the series of tracts, "On Christian Socialism," was "Cheap Clothes, and Nasty, by Parson Lot" [now republished in Kingsley's *Alton Locke*], exposing the sweating and slop-selling system, which was at the root of much of the distress in London and the great towns. The opening sentences of this tract were:

"King Ryence, says the legend of King Arthur, wore a paletot trimmed with kings' beards. In the first French Revolution (so Carlyle assures us) there were at Meudon tanneries of human skins. Mammon, at once tyrant and revolutionary, follows both these noble examples—in a more respectable way, doubtless, for Mammon hates cruelty; bodily pain is his devil—the worst evil of which he, in his effeminacy, can conceive. So he shrieks benevolently when a drunken soldier is flogged; but he trims his paletots, and adorns his legs, with the flesh of men and the skins of women, with degradation, pestilence, heathendom, and despair; and then chuckles, self-complacently, over the smallness of his tailor's bills. Hypocrite! straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel! What is flogging or hanging, King Ryence's paletot, or the tanneries of Meudon, to the slavery, starvation, waste of life, year-long imprisonment in dungeons narrower and fouler than those of the Inquisition, which goes on among thousands of English clothes-makers at this day?"[1]

[1] *Charles Kingsley: His Letters and Memories of His Life*, i. 192.

Work! work! work!
While the cock is crowing aloof!
And work—work—work,
Till the stars shine through the roof!
It's oh! to be a slave
Along with the barbarous Turk,
Where woman has never a soul to save,
If this is Christian work!

Oh, Men, with Sisters dear!
Oh, Men, with Mothers and Wives!
It is not linen you're wearing out,
But human creatures' lives!
Stitch—stitch—stitch,
In poverty, hunger and dirt,
Sewing at once, with a double thread,
A Shroud as well as a Shirt.

But why do I talk of Death?
That Phantom of grisly bone,
I hardly fear his terrible shape,
It seems so like my own—
It seems so like my own,
Because of the fasts I keep;
Oh, God! that bread should be so dear,
And flesh and blood so cheap!

Seam, and gusset, and band,
Band, and gusset, and seam,
Work, work, work,
Like the Engine that works by Steam!
A mere machine of iron and wood,
That toils for Mammon's sake,
Without a brain to ponder and craze,
Or a heart to feel—and break![1]

¶ "The Song of the Shirt" laid hold on him, as Plato sometimes did, and with a firmer grasp. That startling sorrow touched the hearts of thousands, but stamped its image on his like a seal on softened wax, and the impression was seen on his face as if an affliction had visited his home. For weeks after its appearance the pitiful dirge seemed to engross his thoughts and affections. He referred to it from the pulpit, if my memory does not err, and

[1] Thomas Hood, *The Song of the Shirt.*

was full of it in conversation. "'The Song of the Shirt,'" he said, "is one of the best sermons that has been preached for many a day. This lay sermon teaches a great lesson to the Church."[1]

II.

A Vision of Restoration.

But in the latter days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and peoples shall flow unto it. And many nations shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge between many peoples, and shall reprove strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the Lord of hosts hath spoken it. For all the peoples will walk every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever.—Mic. iv. 1–5.

1. The picture of disaster and ruin is followed (in the manner of the other prophets, especially Isaiah) by a vision of restoration. Zion, no longer ruined and deserted, is pictured by the prophet as invested with even greater glory than before; it has become the spiritual metropolis of the entire earth; pilgrims flock to it from all quarters; a "federation of the world" has been established under the suzerainty of the God of Israel. In that day the banished and suffering Israelites will be restored; and Jehovah will reign over them in Zion for ever. The prophet proceeds to contemplate the ultimate revival of the kingdom of David; but he returns to the present (or immediate future), and dwells on the period of distress which must be passed through before that revival can be consummated. "*Now*, why dost thou cry out aloud?" he exclaims; for he hears in imagination the wail of despair and pain rising from the capital at the approach of the foe (the Assyrian); the painful process must continue till the new birth has been achieved; the nation must leave the city, dwell in the field, and journey *even to Babylon*; there will it be delivered and

[1] A. Moody Stuart, *Recollections of the late John Duncan*, 115.

rescued from its foes. But *now—i.e.*, in the present (or immediate future)—many nations are assembled against Zion, eager to see her prostrate in the dust; they know not, however, Jehovah's purpose. He has assembled them only that they may be gathered themselves "as the sheaves into the floor," and there "threshed" by the triumphant daughter of Zion herself. And yet, *now*, there is a siege imminent; and humiliation awaits the chief magistrate of Israel (the king). The ruler who is to be his people's deliverer will arise from another quarter, from the insignificant town of Bethlehem; and Israel will be "given up"—*i.e.*, abandoned to its foes—until he appears and reunites the scattered nation. Then will Israel dwell securely: when danger threatens, capable men will be at hand, in more than sufficient numbers to ward it off; when the *Assyrian* essays to invade the territory of Judah, under the leadership of its ideal king he will be triumphantly repelled. Upon those of the nations who are disposed to welcome it, the "remnant of Jacob" will exert an influence like that of the softly-falling, beneficent dew; towards those who resist it, it will be as a fierce, destructive lion. Finally, Micah points to the inward notes of the nation's changed state, destruction of warlike implements, which will no longer be needed, and of idolatry, in which it will no longer find its delight.

¶ We are labouring that the development of human society may be, as far as possible, in the likeness of the Divine society; in the likeness of the heavenly country, where all are equal; where there exists but one love, but one happiness for all. We seek the paths of heaven upon earth; for we know that this earth was given us for our workshop; that through it we can rise to heaven; that by our earthly works we shall be judged; by the number of the poor whom we have assisted; by the number of the unhappy whom we have consoled. The law of God has not two weights and two measures. Christ came for all: He spoke to all: He died for all. We cannot logically declare the children of God to be equal before God, and unequal before men. . . . We cannot admit that, instead of loving one another like brethren, men ought to be divided, hostile, selfish, jealous, city of city, nation of nation. We protest, then, against all inequality, against all oppression, wheresoever it is practised; for we acknowledge no foreigners; we recognize only the just and the unjust; the friends and the enemies of the Law of God.[1]

[1] *Life and Writings of Mazzini*, vi. 99.

2. Perhaps we do wrong to attempt to range the prophecies of Micah in an order of succession. Different visions of the future present themselves to his mental eye. He does not accurately distinguish the order in which the events were to occur; still less does he indicate the intervals of time which were to separate them. His prophecies were never intended to be a chronological chart of the history of the future. But the leading ideas of his prophecy are the regeneration of Israel through judgment, the establishment of the kingdom of Jehovah under the ideal king of David's line, the evangelization of the nations through that kingdom. In the main, they are the same as those of Isaiah. The prophet of the court and the prophet of the people are in fundamental agreement. Micah goes further than Isaiah, in predicting the birth of the Messiah in Bethlehem. The significance of that prophecy, in its original context, lies in its suggestion of the circumstances in which the Messiah was to be born, rather than in the prediction of the precise place of His birth; but its literal fulfilment was one of those signs connected with the birth of Jesus which were unmistakably significant alike to the simple and to the learned.

¶ "Son of David" is the most characteristic, as it is the most traditional and historic, designation of the Jewish Messiah. It expresses the most representative type of Messianic expectation, if we understand by that term an anointed Jewish king who was to be the national deliverer. This conception had its roots in the days of Isaiah of Jerusalem, and revived in the age of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and even survived in attenuated form to the early days of post-Exilic Judaism. The Synoptic Gospels furnish clear evidence that the national expectations which were directed to a Davidic Messiah in the middle of the last century B.C. still prevailed in the days of Jesus. The very form of the Matthew and Luke traditions respecting our Lord's birth exhibits an endeavour to conform to the prevalent expectation that the Messiah would be of Davidic descent. The divergent pedigrees in the two Gospels trace the genealogy of Joseph, the reputed father of Jesus, from David. Both lay stress on Bethlehem as Christ's birthplace, in conformity with the oracle in Micah v. 2.[1]

3. The prophets of every age looked for a King to come. Each age, of course, expected him in the qualities of power and

[1] O. C. Whitehouse, in Hastings' *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, ii. 176.

character needed for its own troubles, and the ideal changed from glory unto glory. From valour and victory in war, it became peace and good government, care for the poor and the oppressed, sympathy with the sufferings of the whole people, but especially of the righteous among them, with fidelity to the truth delivered unto the fathers, and, finally, a conscience for the people's sin, a bearing of their punishment and a travail for their spiritual redemption. But all these qualities and functions were gathered upon an individual—a Victor, a King, a Prophet, a Martyr, a Servant of the Lord.

Micah stands among the first, if he is not the very first, who thus focussed the hopes of Israel upon a great Redeemer; and his promise of Him shares all the characteristics just described. In his book it lies next a number of brief oracles with which we are unable to trace its immediate connexion. They differ from it in style and rhythm: they are in verse, while it seems to be in prose. They do not appear to have been uttered along with it. But they reflect the troubles out of which the Hero is expected to emerge, and the deliverance which He shall accomplish, though at first they picture the latter without any hint of Himself. They apparently describe an invasion which is actually in course, rather than one which is near and inevitable; and if so they can only date from Sennacherib's campaign against Judah in 701 B.C. Jerusalem is in siege, standing alone in the land, like one of those solitary towers with folds round them which were built here and there upon the border pastures of Israel for defence of the flock against the raiders of the desert. The prophet sees the possibility of Zion's capitulation, but the people shall leave her only for their deliverance elsewhere. Many are gathered against her, but he sees them as sheaves upon the floor for Zion to thresh. This oracle cannot, of course, have been uttered at the same time as the previous one, but there is no reason why the same prophet should not have uttered both, at different periods. Isaiah had prospects of the fate of Jerusalem which differ quite as much. Once more the blockade is established. Israel's ruler is helpless, "smitten on the cheek by the foe." It is to this last picture that the promise of the Deliverer is attached.

Bethlehem was the birthplace of David, but when Micah says that the Deliverer shall emerge from her he does not mean only

what Isaiah affirms by his promise of a rod from the stock of Jesse—that the King to come shall spring from the one great dynasty in Judah. Micah means rather to emphasize the rustic and popular origin of the Messiah, "too small to be among the thousands of Judah." David, the son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, was a dearer figure than Solomon, son of David the king. He impressed the people's imagination, because he had sprung from themselves, and in his lifetime he had been the popular rival of an unlovable despot. Micah himself was the prophet of the country as distinct from the capital, of the peasants as against the rich who oppressed them. When, therefore, he fixed upon Bethlehem as the Messiah's birthplace, he doubtless desired, without departing from the orthodox hope in the Davidic dynasty, to throw round its new representative those associations which had so endeared to the people their father-monarch. The shepherds of Judah, that strong source of undefiled life from which the fortunes of the State and prophecy itself had ever been recuperated, should again send forth salvation.

¶ The word "Messiah" may be said to present, along with varying secondary elements, one main idea. It means, of course, "anointed," and anointing had for the Hebrew people a sacramental significance. The sacred oil represented a Divine effluence, enwrapping the man over whom it was poured, making him holy. It was thus that the representatives of the Divine Ruler were set apart, consecrated. It was thus that Saul and David were, we are told, endued with the spirit of Jahweh. It was thus that the word was used of the appointment, with or without the use of oil, of a prophet. The Messiah of the Greek and Roman periods of Jewish history (who was to slay with the breath of His lips the enemies of the righteous and to rule in the coming age over those who should then be living and those who should be raised from the dead) was to be anointed, enwrapped, with the Divine Spirit.

The degree of supernaturalism attributed to the Messiah varied. He was always anthropically conceived. He was a Son of Man. If existing ideally in the Divine Mind from eternity, He belonged actually to the time-order, to history. The models upon which the conception of Him was built up were Moses, David, and, with reservations, the Babylonian and Persian kings. His differentia was that to His human equipment the Divine King on whom He leaned added, as a gift, wisdom and power such as were not given to common men. He was "sent," or "raised up,"

to right the wrongs of earth, to establish a state of things wherein righteousness and happiness should march together, to declare the will of God and to make that will dominant in the society over which He ruled.[1]

III.

God's Controversy with His People.

He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?—Mic. vi. 8.

1. The third section of Micah's prophecy, counting it as an integral part of the book, is best construed as a less impassioned, more thoughtful, and somewhat apologetic confirmation of the necessity, justice, and inevitable issue of the imminent calamity. In structure it is exceedingly dramatic, falling constantly into dialogue, in which the speakers rapidly change. Jehovah is dramatically represented as commencing a suit with Israel. He defends His faithfulness to His side of the covenant, and contrasts His real demands with the popular idea of religion. The wilful disregard of these requirements calls for punishment. The prophet speaks in the name of the true Israel, lamenting the universal corruption, and expressing its determination humbly to bear the punishment, in perfect confidence that Jehovah will one day vindicate His righteousness. In answer is heard the Divine proclamation for Zion's restoration. The prophet prays for this restoration, and Jehovah promises to bring it about. He concludes with an expression of perfect trust in the pardoning mercy and unchanging faithfulness of Jehovah.

2. In the religious history of mankind in general there has been little connexion between religion and righteousness in the ethical sense. Even the Jewish Church was slow in reaching the conception of personal and moral righteousness as the central thing in religion. For a long time legal and ritual righteousness was the main thing, rather than holiness of heart and life. The prophets were the earliest preachers of spiritual religion. They

[1] R. J. Fletcher, *Dei Christus, Dei Verbum*, 25.

saw that God looks at the heart, and that what He supremely desires is the inward loyalty to righteousness. Everything else is instrumental to this. But there is always a tendency with the mechanically and unspiritually minded to mistake the forms and adjuncts and rites and ceremonies of religion for religion itself, and to rest in them. This happens in our own day; the religious thought and life of many centre in the externals of religion; and all the more it happened in the times of ignorance of the ancient Church. Hence the prophets had as one of their burdens to oppose this tendency and to set forth the spiritual nature of God's demands.

3. In spite of the preaching of Amos and Hosea, Israel persisted in cherishing an illusion. The key to the situation is furnished by Micah iii. 11. A wrong conception of God held sway over the minds of the people. "Is not the Lord in the midst of us? no evil shall come upon us." This was to look upon the relation of Jehovah to His people as necessary, and not voluntary on His part. It was to conceive of that relation, moreover, as unconditioned by any high demands. There was no essential difference between this conception of God and that common to the nations surrounding Israel. The language of iii. 11 is, of course, not to be taken as literally exact. Israel had experienced too many chastisements at the hands of Jehovah to suppose that it possessed any guarantee against further afflictions. Jehovah might become angry at His land and vent His wrath upon His people for some real or fancied slight, even as Chemosh executed his anger upon Moab (*Mesha Inscription*, line 5). But He would not definitely abandon His people to destruction; He could not remain obdurate and insensible to holocausts of oxen and rivers of oil. On His great Day, the Day of Jehovah, He would repent Himself of His anger and manifest Himself on behalf of His people in destructive might against their foes and His (cf. Amos v. 18). For people so minded, sacrifice and offering were the substance of religion. Let the ritual be exact and gorgeous and the sacrificial gifts numerous and costly, and Jehovah could desire little more (cf. Is. i. 11 ff.).

4. Against this whole attitude toward God, the prophets of the eighth century set themselves resolutely. Micah joined with

Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah in an effort to purify religion by elevating the popular conception of God. This he does by emphasizing the true nature of Jehovah's demands upon His people. He seeks justice and mercy, not oxen and sheep. He desires right character rather than right ritual. Herein lies Micah's whole interest; he plays the changes upon this single string. He does not suppose himself to be announcing anything new to the people, nor indeed was he so doing. Israel had long credited Jehovah with ethical interests. But they were given only secondary significance, whereas Micah would make them the supremely important element in the Divine character in so far as it concerns men. Divine favour consequently at once ceases to be an affair of purchase at any price, and becomes a matter of striving after the attainment of Divine ideals of righteousness and justice.

Micah's statement might be paraphrased as follows without altering its essential meaning: "Religion in its essence is righteousness and good-will toward men and reverent humility and obedience toward God." And this is no lonely utterance of this prophet; it is the underlying idea of both prophetic and apostolic teaching, as well as of the teaching of our Lord. Whatever our theological faith, whatever our religious practices, and whatever our religious pedagogics, their sole use and value consist in helping us to lives of love and righteousness before God and man. This is that for which they exist, and that which gives them meaning and justification.

¶ In most of the controversies which the prophets open between God and man, the subject on the side of the latter is his sin. But that is not so here. In the controversy which opens the Book of Micah the argument falls upon the transgressions of the people, but here upon their sincere though mistaken methods of approaching God. There God deals with dull consciences, but here with darkened and imploring hearts. In that case we had rebels forsaking the true God for idols, but here are earnest seekers after God, who have lost their way and are weary. Accordingly, as indignation prevailed there, here prevails pity; and though formally this be a controversy under the same legal form as before, the passage breathes tenderness and gentleness from first to last. By this as well as by the recollections of the ancient history of Israel we are reminded of the style of Hosea. But there is no expostulation, as in his book, with the people's continued devotion

to ritual. All that is past, and a new temper prevails. Israel have at last come to feel the vanity of the exaggerated zeal with which Amos pictures them exceeding the legal requirements of sacrifice; and with a despair, sufficiently evident in the superlatives which they use, they confess the futility and weariness of the whole system, even in the most lavish and impossible forms of sacrifice. What then remains for them to do? The prophet answers with the beautiful words that express an ideal of religion to which no subsequent century has ever been able to add either grandeur or tenderness:

> "He hath shown thee, O man, what is good;
> And what is the Lord seeking from thee,
> But to do justice and love mercy,
> And humbly to walk with thy God?"

This is the greatest saying of the Old Testament; and there is only one other in the New which excels it: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."[1]

5. The closing verses of the Book of Micah seem to be a collection of miscellaneous fragments from periods far apart in the history of Israel. One historical allusion suits best the age of the Syrian wars; another can refer only to the day of Jerusalem's ruin. In spirit and language the confessions resemble the prayers of the Exile. The doxology has echoes of several Scriptures. But from these fragments, it may be of many centuries, there rises clear the one essential figure: Israel, all her secular woes upon her; our Mother of Sorrows, at whose knees we learned our first prayers of confession and penitence. Other nations have been our teachers in art and wisdom and government. But she is our mistress in pain and in patience, teaching men with what conscience they should bear the chastening of the Almighty, with what hope and humility they should wait for their God. Surely not less lovable, but only more human, that her pale cheeks flush for a moment with the hate of the enemy and the assurance of revenge. Her passion is soon gone, for she feels her guilt to be greater; and, seeking forgiveness, her last word is

[1] G. A. Smith, *The Book of the Twelve Prophets*, i. 424.

what man's must ever be, praise to the grace and mercy of God.

¶ Can none of you look back on any particular days or nights, and say, "O Lord, that Thou shouldst be so patient and so full of forbearance as not to send me to hell at such an instant! But, O Lord, that Thou shouldst go further and blot out mine iniquities, for Thine own sake, when I made Thee serve with my sins!" Lord, what shall I say it is? It is the free grace of my God! What expression transcendeth that, I know not.[1]

6. What the immediate effect of Micah's preaching was we have no means of knowing. Apart from the record of his prophecies we have but one absolutely authentic reminiscence of his life-work. It is related in the twenty-sixth chapter of Jeremiah. The prophet of woes, at the bidding of God, had proclaimed the imminent destruction of the city and of the Temple. Arraigned on a capital charge, he is saved by the intervention of certain elders. "Micah the Morasthite," say they, "prophesied in the days of Hezekiah, king of Judah, and spake to all the people of Judah, saying, Thus saith the Lord of Hosts; Zion shall be plowed like a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of a forest. Did Hezekiah king of Judah and all Judah put him at all to death? did he not fear the Lord, and besought the Lord, and the Lord repented him of the evil which he had pronounced against them?"

The reference is of great interest. It shows what a great impression Micah produced on his contemporaries. And this is not strange; for he spoke to the masses of the people as one of themselves, and his whole picture of judgment and deliverance was constructed of familiar elements and appealed to the most cherished traditions of the past. David, as it is easy to recognize from the narrative of the Books of Samuel, was the hero of the common people; and no more effective method of popular teaching could have been devised than the presentation of the antique simplicity of his kingdom in contrast to the corruptions of the present. Thus Micah's teaching went straighter to the hearts of the masses than the doctrine of Isaiah, which at this time was still working only as leaven in a small circle. Isaiah's work, in

[1] John Owen.

truth, was the higher as it was the more difficult; it was a greater task to consolidate the party of spiritual faith, and by slow degrees to establish its influence in the governing circle, than to arouse the masses to a sense of the incongruity of the present state of things with the old ideal of Jehovah's nation. But both prophets had their share of the great transformation of Israel's religion which began in the reign of Hezekiah and found definite expression in the reformation of Josiah. It is Micah's conception of the Davidic king that is reproduced in the Deuteronomic law of the kingdom (Deut. xvii. 14 ff.), and his prophecy of the destruction of the high places (v. 13), more directly than anything in Isaiah's book, underlies the principle of the one sanctuary, the establishment of which, in Deuteronomy and by Josiah, was the chief visible mark of the religious revolution which the teaching of the prophets had effected.

A man of the countryside, like Amos, Micah was gifted with clearness of vision and time for thought. The simplicity and seclusion of his rustic life were conducive to "plain living and high thinking." He was not misled by false standards of value to place too high an estimate upon those things which perish with the using. He had Amos's passion for justice and Hosea's heart of love. Knowing his fellow-countrymen intimately, and sympathizing profoundly with their sufferings and wrongs, his spirit burned with indignation as he beheld the injustice and tyranny of their rich oppressors. He was pre-eminently the prophet of the poor. He was absolutely fearless as their champion. He would denounce wickedness in high places even though it cost him his life. A man of this type must necessarily go his own way; he cannot slavishly follow where others lead. Breaking away from the prophets of the day who promise only blessings from Jehovah, he dares to "declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin," and to point out the inevitable connexion between sin and punishment. To the citizens of Jerusalem, proud of their capital and blindly confident of Jehovah's protection, he unflinchingly announces the overthrow of their city. Completely dominated by a vivid consciousness of God and a fervid devotion to the highest interests of his country, he goes forth to his task unshrinking and invincible. To this man of keen perception and sensitive soul, the voice of duty was the

voice of God. As with Amos and Hosea, neither angel nor vision was necessary to arouse in him the prophetic spirit; he found his Divine call in the cry of human need.

¶ The Christian conscience needs to avail itself of the new knowledge of social facts, the new understanding of social processes, which alone can interpret its opportunity of sympathy and service. There must be dedication of the mind to the task of understanding the Will of God for modern life. Needs arise, and can only be met in ways which are not visible on the surface. Sympathy needs to be trained, that thoroughly and sanely it may flow into the right channels and contribute to the lasting satisfaction of the real need.

We have learned to recognize and respond to the suffering which comes through sickness, death, calamity to fortune, separation from old friends and old haunts. Have we learned to appreciate to the same extent the suffering that comes to our fellows through their hours and conditions of labour, irregularity of employment, the advance of prices whilst income remains small and stationary, the incidence of a new tax, the loss of business through legislation meant only to benefit poorer men, temptation to grievous sin in times of pennilessness and homelessness, the fear of losing employment through age, failing skill, fluctuation of trade, or other cause beyond one's own control? Are we sensitive to the change in the problems of life, religion, and character which come through the waning of an old industry, the closing of a mill, the failure of a mine, the depletion of the country towns and villages, sudden changes in the hours of labour, the sinking of a new pit and the consequent mushroom growth of a new community, the economic independence of working-class girls and boys, the failure of the apprenticeship system, the changing relations between children and parents due to the changed conditions of employment, the weakening of home ties, the unhealthiness of factory life, the dearth of playing-fields, the congestion of population in a new suburb or an old slum? These and a hundred other such things are the crucial issues in lives which appeal to us for neighbourly consideration.[1]

7. Amos, Hosea, and Micah form a splendid triad, a potent factor in the world's history. Their strength lies in their intense, passionate hatred of vice as the negation of religion. To Amos the great offence is judicial corruption, to Hosea sensuality, to Micah rapacity; and they have together so woven religion and

[1] M. Spencer, *The Hope of the Redemption of Society*, 77.

morality into one perfect whole that they can never be divided. They lived in an age when individualism was first coming clearly into play, and, neglecting all aspects of it except that which was evil, they inveighed against it with an enthusiasm amounting to ferocity. The great thing is that in the moral sphere they were successful. Practice, of course, always falls far short of the teaching of the moralists, but Israel recognized, in a way no other ancient nation did, that their religion and their national existence were bound up with man's duty to his neighbour. It remained for a greater than any of these three to take their teaching and unite it with the trend of national development.

¶ With all its superficial confusion there is a common language of humanity in the Land of Shinar [the district around Tottenham Court Road inhabited mainly by people of alien races]. Lord Bacon points out that "all colours agree in the dark"; and in our "Poverty Flats" all creeds blend, or merge into the one creed, which is a belief in love. One day I was out canvassing, endeavouring to persuade my neighbours that I was fitted to represent them on the London County Council. In a third floor back there was an old lady who was on the municipal register. She was very infirm, but her single room was a picture of neatness. I found that some forty people were living in the house. "We know of forty," she whispered, suggesting that there might be a few more whom nobody knew. I had noticed that there was apparently only one water-tap for the house, and that was on the ground floor. This she confirmed; and when I asked her how she got her water up to the top of the house, she told me a beautiful story. A French woman from the other end of the street had called in to visit a fellow-countrywoman in this house, and hearing casually of this infirm old lady in a back room at the top of the house, had straightway gone up and offered to come in every day and carry up water for her. This she did month after month, with many added kindnesses. Between the two there was no racial tie. They could not even speak the same language. One was a Protestant and the other a Catholic. But they were "neighbours" in Christ's great sense of the word, and that was enough. I saw the good Samaritan before leaving the house. She had the bright face and animated manner of her race, and made nothing of her self-appointed task. She was a dweller in a mean street whom no street could make mean.[1]

[1] C. Silvester Horne, *Pulpit, Platform, and Parliament*, 114.

NAHUM.

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NAHUM.

The burden of Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite. —Nah. i. 1.

1. THERE are two prophetical books in the Old Testament which have no direct reference to the chosen people—those of Jonah and of Nahum. Both of them are concerned with the fate of Nineveh. The city of which they both speak was the capital of the empire which has been brought so frequently before us by Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah. Both Jonah and Nahum, though they contemplate this empire in different periods, see it not triumphant but tottering. They present it therefore to us in a new point of view, and they illustrate the office of the Jewish prophet the more strikingly for their apparent neglect of Jewish affairs.

2. The prophecy of Nahum is simple and unique. It concerns itself with only one theme—Nineveh is on the brink of destruction; there is no possibility of escape for her. In ecstatic contemplation of this "consummation devoutly to be wished" the prophet is wholly absorbed. He can, he will, see nothing else. The task of other prophets had been that of calling their countrymen to repentance and of pointing out to them a much more excellent way to assure themselves of the favour of God than that along which they had been travelling. The future of Israel was precious indeed in the sight of God; but only a radical readjustment of life in the present could make that future anything but disastrous. Of all this Nahum has not a word. In place of it there appears a certain fiery form of indignation against Judah's ancient foe, which exhibits a degree of animosity for which the great ethical prophets furnish no parallel. The pent-up feelings of generations of suffering patriots here burst forth into flame. The whole prophecy is a pæan of triumph over a prostrate foe and breathes out the spirit of exultant revenge.

¶ The utterances preserved in the Book of Nahum are not easily adjustable to a particular time. They represent the feelings of nearly a century. When Sennacherib, in 701 B.C., suddenly returned to Assyria, he did not leave behind him an independent Judah. Jerusalem was inviolate, but the nation was a vassal, and so remained for three-quarters of a century. The prophecy was not delivered earlier than 660, for Nahum uses as an illustration the case of Thebes (No-amon, iii. 8), which was captured, in spite of her fancied strength, by Assurbanipal in 663 B.C. On the other hand, it cannot be later than 606, the year of Nineveh's destruction. Between these dates the prophet must have lived. The only clue to the exact date of the predictions is their contents, which describe a hopeless outlook for haughty Nineveh.

Such an outlook could hardly have been imagined before the closing years of Assurbanipal's long (668–625) and brilliant reign. Egypt then successfully revolted. The resolute and hardy mountaineers, the Medes, became dangerous foes. The Scythians swept down from the distant north, spreading unparalleled desolation through the wide and fertile Mesopotamian plains. While none of these foes ventured to attack the capital city, they robbed it of much of its prestige. When the great king died, his nation came to an end as speedily as did Northern Israel after the death of Jeroboam II. Almost at once, according to Herodotus, the Medes attempted an assault of Nineveh, but were obliged to abandon the attempt because they were summoned back to defend their own homes. Nearly eighteen years later, about 608 B.C., they tried again, and within three years captured the city, and put an end to the Assyrian Empire.[1]

¶ The certain fact is that at the time of Nahum's utterance the prestige of Nineveh was wholly gone. She was threatened with immediate destruction. The enemy was already in the land and her downfall seemed certain. This interpretation might have been placed by Nahum upon the situation as it was either in 625 B.C. or in 608–606 B.C. But the degree of animosity toward Nineveh accords better, perhaps, with the post-Deuteronomic date, 608–606 B.C., than with the pre-Deuteronomic period. The expectation of Nahum was certainly not fulfilled till about 606 B.C., and, if the prophet is to be credited with an adequate knowledge of the movements of his day, we shall be forced to interpret his utterance as applying to the final siege. On the whole, therefore, it is better to place him there than at the earlier date, until we have more definite information as to the course of events in

[1] F. K. Sanders and C. F. Kent, *The Messages of the Earlier Prophets*, 174.

Assyria during her last days and as to the exactness of the information in possession of the Hebrews regarding the political movements of the time. In any case, the significance of the prophecy will remain the same, whichever of the two dates be chosen.[1]

3. If Nahum lived and prophesied in the days immediately preceding the downfall of Nineveh, his lot was cast in desperate times. The good King Josiah had but recently fallen in battle at Megiddo. His successor, Jehoahaz, had been taken prisoner to Egypt, after a reign of only three months, and Jehoiakim had been imposed upon Judah as a vassal of Pharaoh-Necho. A heavy annual tribute was laid upon Judah, and it was Jehoiakim's ungracious task to collect and transmit it to Egypt. The practical freedom that had been enjoyed for some time under Josiah had given place to a galling servitude. The news of the approaching end of a former taskmaster was a ray of light amid Egyptian darkness.

As for Nahum himself, we know him only by means of this brief prophecy; and, if it reveals vividness of imagination and intensity of feeling, it certainly shows an unusual narrowness of range in one who possessed great gifts, and who saw these scenes with the poet's eye.

¶ The title calls Nahum the Elḳôshite — that is, native or citizen of Elḳôsh. Three positions have been claimed for this place, which is not mentioned elsewhere in the Bible: Al-Kush, somewhat north of the site of ancient Nineveh; Elkese, a village of Galilee, mentioned by Jerome; and a village of Southern Judah. The first-mentioned locality is attractive in its suggestion that Nahum was an Israelite, expatriated a century before, but still loyal to his ancestral ideals, and that, as an eye-witness, he described with faithfulness the closing scenes in the career of fated Nineveh. One would like to accept the suggestion that here was a man who belonged to "the lost ten tribes" and was not lost; a member of that section of Israel which suffered most severely from Assyria commissioned to herald the doom of the proud, cruel empire. There would surely be more than "poetic justice" in that; such a view may be permitted as a "pious opinion," but cannot claim to rank as a sure result of historical investigation.

[1] J. M. P. Smith.

4. Nahum's poetry is fine. Of all the prophets he is the one who in dignity and force approaches most nearly to Isaiah. His descriptions are singularly picturesque and vivid; his imagery is effective and striking; the thought is always expressed compactly; the parallelism is regular; there is no trace of that prolixity of style which becomes soon afterwards a characteristic of the prophets of the Chaldæan period. His language is strong and brilliant; his rhythm rumbles and rolls, leaps and flashes, like the horsemen and chariots he describes. He has an unexcelled capacity for bringing a situation vividly before the mind's eye. His constructive imagination lays hold of the central elements of a scene and with realistic imagery and picturesque phraseology recreates it for his readers. Through the whole scene there moves a mighty passion and a great joy which lift the narrative out of the commonplace into the majestic and make of it great literature.

I.

The True God and His Foe.

The Lord is a jealous God and avengeth; the Lord avengeth and is full of wrath; the Lord taketh vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies.—Nah. i. 2.

The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that put their trust in him.—Nah. i. 7.

1. The general thought of the acrostic psalm introducing the prophecy of Nahum concerns itself with the terrors of Jehovah's anger against His foes. In an ever-changing series of bold and striking metaphors the poet seeks to create a vivid impression of this Divine wrath and thus to quicken the faith and hope of those who have trusted in and obeyed Jehovah.

> "Jehovah is a jealous God and an avenger;
> Jehovah is an avenger and full of wrath;
> Jehovah is an avenger unto his adversaries;
> And he reserveth wrath for his enemies."

He brooks no rival. He will not condone iniquity. If He seem at times slack to interfere, it is the patience of omnipotence,

and neither the helplessness of impotence nor the apathy of indifference. When once He wills to act, none can resist His power.

"Before his indignation who can stand?
And who can rise up in the fierceness of his anger?
His fury is poured out like fire,
And the rocks are broken asunder by him."

2. The repetition of the fact of Jehovah's vengeance is modified by the statement that the Mighty One is also slow to anger, and that

"Jehovah is good, a strong hold in the day of adversity;
And he knoweth them that take refuge in him."

His judgment is not the contrast to His goodness, but the proof of it. There is no need to mention the name of the arch-adversary, the embodiment of antagonism to Jehovah. The prophet's eye is riveted upon that guilty city. Her offence is insolent defiance of Jehovah, high-handed oppression not of His chosen people only, but of a multitude of nations, upon whom she has trampled with brutal inhumanity. The genius of the tyrant race—Sennacherib, or some other Assyrian king—was her typical representative, and to him the prophet's mind turns. He thought to do evil against the Lord, and counselled mischief, but whatever the strength and the numbers of Jehovah's foes be, "they shall be cut down and pass away."

3. And now there is a kind word for Judah. There will be no more affliction for her as has been in the past. The yoke will be broken off from her neck and her fetters burst asunder. As for the race of the tyrant, the Divine decree, declaring barrenness as its fate, has gone forth. Its very temple and altars shall be robbed of their gods and images. Only a grave is needed for the worthless race.

"Behold, upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace!" What a joyous note, suggestive, however, of the same message in a time much later than that of Nahum! "Keep thy feasts, O Judah, perform thy vows: for the wicked one shall no more pass through thee; he is utterly cut off."

4. The religion of this proem to the Book of Nahum is thoroughly Oriental in its sense of God's method and resources of destruction; very Jewish, and very natural to that age of Jewish history, in the bursting of its long-pent hopes of revenge. We of the West might express these hopes differently. We should not attribute so much personal passion to the Avenger. With our keener sense of law we should emphasize the slowness of the process, and select for its illustration the forces of decay rather than those of sudden ruin. But we must remember the crashing times in which the Jews lived. The world was breaking up. The elements were loose, and all that God's own people could hope for was the bursting of their yoke, with a little shelter in the day of trouble. The elements were loose, but amidst the blind crash the little people knew that Jehovah knew them.

¶ The wrath of God is an expression which has played a great part in Christian teaching. "Flee from the wrath to come." "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness." "What!" many pious souls have exclaimed, "can we impute the harbouring and exhibition of anger to the heavenly Father?" Men speak unguardedly of an "angry judge"; but no judge would be tolerated who allowed himself to be angry on the bench. The calm, dispassionate condemnation of wrong is that which gives weight to the words of our judges. Nevertheless, where cruelty or tricky dishonesty is brought home to the criminal, a good judge will hardly restrain the strong feeling of indignation. We must observe, however, that the object of God's wrath is in its true essence not the sinner, but the sin. And a just indignation, if shown by one in authority, will always be directed, not to the injury of the wrong-doer, but to his reclamation. In the Scriptures every punitive infliction is attributed to the wrath of God, as, for instance, St. Paul's prediction (2 Thess. xi. 6, etc.) of the destruction of Jerusalem. What is anger in the weak man against his child is sublimated, when spoken of God, to a hatred of the evil which is injuring His children, and a determination, even by the infliction of suffering, to rid them from it.[1]

¶ One event in history expresses to the full the moral terribleness of God. The passion of Jesus Christ is the crown of all terrible things, and the supreme measure, not only as we are accustomed to say, of God's mercy, but quite as really of God's severity. How does God estimate pain in comparison of guilt? Is He of such deadly earnestness in His displeasure against wrong

[1] W. H. Fremantle, *Natural Christianity*, 160.

that He can, in despite of pity, inflict the extreme of pain, of wrath, of bitter death? for, if so, He is beyond question a most fearful God. A Being who possesses such strength as His, and at the same time is not too tender to use it against sin, must be to every sinner unspeakably dreadful. I do not say whether God can inflict uttermost suffering for sin; I say He can endure it. Here is a better test of the firmness of the Divine character and of its capacity for displeasure than any infliction could be. He was hard against Himself. He bore what it would be fearful to see another bear. He pursued sin to His own death, and in His jealousy for justice satisfied justice in His own blood. I make bold to ask every one of you who is not sure that he has repented of his sins, whether he thinks the God who took flesh and died for sin at Jerusalem is a God with whom it is safe to trifle. I do not threaten. I do not know the power of God's anger, and I cannot show it to you. The cross does not show it. Like everything else in this world, it shows pre-eminently God's mercy. His anger is still veiled. Behind the silent blanched face of the sacred Sufferer, in the secrets of His breaking heart, is hidden away from us, among the unsearchable things of God, the wrath of the Eternal against sin. But in the cross I do show you the terribleness of God; how terribly He hates sin; how terribly He is in earnest to be done with it; how terribly small store He sets by any sort of anguish or penalty in comparison of being just. And I tell you that according to His fearfulness so is His wrath.[1]

II.

The Doom of Nineveh.

And it shall come to pass, that all they that look upon thee shall flee from thee, and say, Nineveh is laid waste: who will bemoan her?—Nah. iii. 7.

1. The passage hitherto considered is now usually regarded as having been prefixed to Nahum's prophecy by some later editor. We now come to Nahum's actual oracles. The scene changes from the presence and awful arsenal of the Almighty to the historical consummation of His vengeance. Nahum foresees the siege of Nineveh.

Nineveh was a great city, the centre of a splendid empire, an empire that had a long career of victory; and victory in such a

[1] J. O. Dykes, *Sermons*, 216.

case meant unbridled violence, cruel greed, insatiable lust. This empire was one of the richest, most powerful, and most flagrantly wicked that the world has ever seen.

¶ It was only in 1842 that the site of Nineveh was discovered, but since then the palaces of Sennacherib and Esar-haddon and others have been excavated, and there have been found a number of colossal winged bulls and human-headed lions, sculptured slabs of alabaster panelling the rooms, and cylinders and bricks with cuneiform inscriptions, and many of these have been placed in the British Museum and in other collections. These serve to indicate the wealth, culture, and magnificence of Nineveh (cf. ii. 9). The walls were, according to Diodorus Siculus, 100 feet high, and so broad that three chariots could pass each other upon them. The city was further protected partly by the rivers Tigris and Khusar, and partly by broad moats. Hanging gardens, as at Babylon, were filled with rich plants and rare animals, and served, with temples and palaces, libraries and arsenals, to adorn and enrich the city. This was the splendid city whose destruction Nahum so vividly foresees.[1]

2. With righteous indignation not unmingled with an almost contemptuous exultation Nahum chants her knell. He bids her strain every nerve for defence; repair her walls, make provision for the siege, set her sentinels. But all in vain. A short skirmish outside the walls, and the gates are forced; panic terror paralyses her defenders; the battle rages through her streets; the central citadel surrenders; her vast stores of wealth are plundered; she is stripped bare and naked and exposed to infamy. Nothing remains of all her magnificence but emptiness and desolation and vacuity. The judgment is thorough; there is no healing of the bruise. No more shall the ambassadors of this proud city go forth to dictate oppressive terms to weak peoples. All that hear the noise of her downfall will clap their hands with revengeful joy. Her wickedness has pressed upon all the peoples continually; and when she dies there is no creature to mourn. Men's minds are filled with the solemn conviction that God has taken a great curse from off the face of the earth.

Nahum, of course, is not giving a narrative of the progress of the siege of Nineveh; he is writing upon the eve of it. The military details, the muster, the fighting in the open, the invest-

[1] F. H. Woods and F. E. Powell, *The Hebrew Prophets*, ii. 14.

ment, the assault, he did not need to go to Assyria or to wait for the fall of Nineveh to describe as he has done. Assyria herself (and herein lies much of the pathos of the poem) had made all Western Asia familiar with their horrors for the last two centuries.

¶ The Prophet's indictment against Nineveh has received strange confirmation from the inscriptions and sculptures which have been brought to light in recent years, many of which may be seen in the British Museum. "The barbarities which followed the capture of a town would be almost incredible," writes Professor Sayce, "were they not a subject of boast in the inscriptions which record them." The details of the savage cruelties of the Assyrians are too horrible for quotation. "How deeply seated was their thirst for blood and vengeance on an enemy is exemplified in a bas-relief which represents Assur-bani-pal"—the king, be it remembered, who was Nahum's contemporary—"and his queen feasting in their garden while the head of a conquered Elamite king hangs from a tree above." They are witnesses against themselves that they flagrantly violated every law and instinct of humanity in their lust of conquest and their passion for revenge.[1]

3. To appreciate rightly Nahum's spirited prophecy it must be borne in mind how intense would be the relief at the overthrow of that insolently oppressive power which had so long been the savage scourge of Western Asia, had devastated Israel, and had more than once laid siege to Jerusalem. The prophet expresses not merely the feelings of his own nation, but the exultation of an outraged humanity, that the old lion is at last brought to bay. Nahum may be less spiritual than most of the prophets, but the peculiarly pathetic element in this book is the way in which the evident danger of Nineveh is viewed in its relation to eternal truths. Nahum had a great principle to proclaim—the certain destruction of this world's kingdoms built on the foundation of force and fraud; the triumph of the Kingdom of God reared on the foundation of truth and righteousness. But the limitation of view with which he proclaims this truth is very remarkable. He says nothing concerning the sins of his own people, but concentrates his attention exclusively on a foreign nation, and this at a time when Judah was preparing for the greatest catastrophe in its history. Assyria passes away, but Babylon takes the place, and

[1] A. F. Kirkpatrick, *The Doctrine of the Prophets*, 248.

becomes "the servant of Jehovah" to administer a still severer chastisement upon the people who had rejected so many privileges. For Nahum, Nineveh is the representative of worldly power in antagonism to Jehovah, and Judah is the kingdom of Jehovah, representing Him on earth. Judah is viewed in the abstract in the light of her calling and destiny, in a word, idealized; not in the concrete, as she actually was, failing hopelessly to fulfil that calling.

¶ The environment of the Greeks abnormally developed their power of thought and their sense of beauty, so it has been their mission and function to refine and humanize mankind. Art, letters, philosophy, taste have been their contribution to the education of the world.

Similarly, by reason of its environment, Rome's function and mission was to teach mankind law, organization, government. The Teutonic nations' share in mankind's development has been the teaching of honour, truthfulness, respect for women.

In like manner, because of the special environment which was Israel's in the course of its national life, the spiritual or religious element has been pronouncedly developed in the Hebrews, and their mission has been to give the world its true religion.

But, all said and done, mere naturalism does not account for it all. The only answer which satisfactorily explains all the facts must ever be that Israel developed in a unique religious direction of its own "under the constraint of a Divine training, and under the guiding light of a Divine revelation, and that its Prophets—Moses, Isaiah, Christ—rightly claimed to be the spokesmen and representatives of the one true God."

If it be urged that this would imply an act of favouritism on God's part, unworthy of His character, our answer is that it is precisely because God is full of love and mercy that He thus chose Israel. He set apart the Jews as His chosen people, not out of partiality, but as the instrument in His hands for the purpose He has had in view all along from the beginning of the world—the salvation of all men: "The fixed purpose that all men shall be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth." God does not thus distribute His grace and gifts with a partial or niggard hand. He first selects the Jews to keep the conception of a living righteous Father alive in the midst of an evil world, so that through them He may reach and gather in the Gentiles.[1]

4. Nahum was an enthusiastic, optimistic patriot. The oppression and humiliation endured by his people for generations

[1] J. R. Cohu, *The Old Testament in the Light of Modern Research*, 33.

had long rankled in his soul. He is a fair representative of the state of mind of the average man of his times, whose faith in Jehovah's goodness and power had been severely tried by the continuous spectacle of the sufferings of Israel. Let us remember that the proclamation of vengeance against the outside foe, pleasant as it may be to our patriotic pride, is only a small part of the prophetic activity, and that there is danger that our joy over the enemy's fall may be greater than our hatred of the sins that God has so strikingly condemned. As a matter of fact, this was precisely the temptation to which the Jews yielded in later days; they made the contrast between themselves and the world absolute; privilege and blessing for themselves and severe judgment for those outside became the fixed and central point of their creed. Thus they teach us that one aspect of truth must not be separated from the whole to which it belongs, and in which it finds its explanation.

Nahum as a prophet voices the conscience of humanity, and gives fresh expression to the Divine decree that God will not endure man's inhumanity to man. His book is a burning protest against aught else than righteousness being the foundation of a nation's true prosperity. The vast armaments of Assyria and the wide commerce that filled her coffers with gold gave but the specious appearance of strength. No nation, however supported by standing armies, commercial interests, and plenitude of revenue, can hope to endure if the eternal verities of justice, truth, and humanity are not recognized as the national ideals. Where these are outraged, judgment is certain sooner or later. Thus Nahum implicitly falls into line with Israel's great prophets. He is essentially a preacher of "Nemesis," the doom that overtakes man or nation that is Assyrian in soul.

¶ That the issues of war are in the hands of God is not merely an ancient doctrine of religion, but is confirmed by many facts of experience. In war there is a large element of the unexpected and the incalculable, which is recognized in such sayings as that "except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain." There are often combinations of events which have the aspect of a higher strategy working towards a particular result, so that it can be said that "the stars in their courses fought against Sisera." Again, there are powerful influences making for victory or defeat which are not within the control of the human will, such

as the spirit of enthusiasm which fires the heart of a multitude, or the sudden panic which overwhelms it; and these create a well-founded impression that the determining factor has often been a mysterious work of the Spirit of God in troubling or strengthening the soul of an army or a nation. But the fact which above all points to the hand of God in war is that, in spite of it, and to some extent also by means of it, He has steadily guided the human race along the path of progress. War is in itself so essentially irrational, so fierce and cruel, so destructive and demoralizing, and it has raged so widely and generally among the successive generations, that it might have been expected to check every upward movement, to leave on every people a deep mark of brutality and ferocity, and to make the Kingdom of God seem an empty dream. But when we find that the case has been otherwise, that there has been a sure though slow progress in civilization, and a growing self-assertion of the moral forces which make for law and order, for righteousness and for humanity, the inference seems irresistible that the outbreaks of human violence have fallen within the control of a higher power which said "thus far shalt thou go and no further," which on the whole and in the long run gave the victory to the representatives of the better cause, and which had the wisdom and the strength to overrule the evil for good.[1]

A cause like ours is holy,
And it useth holy things;
While over the storm of a righteous strife
May shine the angel's wings.

Where'er our duty leads us,
The grace of God is there,
And the lurid shrine of war may hold
The Eucharist of prayer.[2]

[1] W. P. Paterson, *In the Day of the Muster* (1914), 16.
[2] Paul Hamilton Hayne, *Beauregard's Appeal.*

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HABAKKUK.

The burden which Habakkuk the prophet did see.—Hab. i. 1.

In comparatively recent years the study of the Book of Habakkuk has commanded increased interest. This is largely due to the fact that the time has now gone by when it was felt that the prophecy offered no special difficulty, and when it was thought that the date of its composition and the subject with which it deals were both easily ascertainable. With the rise of historical criticism new interest was aroused in the writing of the prophet, for not only was it discovered, when the same keen and critical tests were applied to it as to the rest of Biblical literature, that it was not free from difficulty, but the difficulties were seen to be such as to give it a place among the most vexed questions which the study of the Old Testament offers. The sequence of thought is not easily made out, and there is a perplexing conflict of scholarly opinion as to what should be regarded as its proper order. There is none, however, as to the beauty, grandeur, and originality of its thought, poetry, and teaching; and perhaps the best method of treating the book is simply to read it as it stands.

1. Habakkuk prophesied most probably about 600 B.C. The times were anxious ones; and the perplexities and questionings to which they gave rise are reflected in his prophecy. Twenty-one years had elapsed since the discovery of Deuteronomy in the Temple in the eighteenth year of Josiah, and nine since the death of Josiah at Megiddo, when he went to oppose Pharaoh-Necho in his effort to annex all Syria as far as the Euphrates to his dominion. Jehoahaz, Josiah's third son, upon whom the popular choice fell as his successor, after a three months' reign—in the course of which, it may be presumed, he had pursued

an anti-Egyptian policy—was summoned by Necho to appear before him at Riblah (on the Orontes), only to be thrown there into chains, and carried away into Egypt, while a heavy fine was imposed upon Judah. His elder brother Eliakim was then put on the throne, his name being changed by the Pharaoh to Jehoiakim. Jehoiakim was a selfish and tyrannical ruler. At a time when the country was impoverished by the collection of the tribute imposed by Necho, he developed a passion for regal magnificence; as Jeremiah tells us, he built by the forced, but unpaid, labour of his subjects a spacious palace "cieled with cedar, and painted with vermilion"; he moreover abused his position to indulge in the common vices of an Oriental despot—his eyes and his heart were set only "upon dishonest gain, and for to shed innocent blood, and for oppression and for violence, for to do it." Nor were such crimes confined to the king. As allusions in Jeremiah show clearly, the reformation of Josiah had affected the masses only superficially: though there were still faithful souls left, lawlessness, injustice, dishonesty, and oppression were only too rife in the nation at large, and idolatry was widely and openly practised.

Meanwhile, political movements of importance had been taking place in the East. In 625 Nabopolassar, a man of enterprise and energy, had become ruler of Babylon; and, though at first nominally viceroy under the suzerainty of Assyria, he had in 612 or 611, if not before, declared his independence. A year or two afterwards Sin-shar-ishkun, the last king of Nineveh, invaded Babylonia for the purpose of recovering his supremacy; but the Ummanmanda, called in by Nabopolassar to assist him, overran Assyria and laid Nineveh in ruins. In 605 Necho, again endeavouring to assert his claim to the country west of the Euphrates, sustained a crushing defeat at Carchemish, on the upper course of the Euphrates, at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, acting as general for his father Nabopolassar. This victory of Nebuchadnezzar was the turning-point in the history of the age. It meant that the Chaldæans were destined to acquire supremacy over the whole of Western Asia. Jeremiah, especially, quickly perceived that this was inevitable; he accepted it at once as providentially intended, and counselled his people to accommodate themselves to circumstances, and acquiesce in a position of

dependence upon the Chaldæans. In point of fact, the countries west of the Euphrates probably at once submitted. Jehoiakim, it is expressly stated, became Nebuchadnezzar's servant for "three years"—though which three years these were between 605 and his death in 597 is not known—then he "turned and rebelled against him." The consequences of Jehoiakim's revolt were: first, the guerilla war mentioned in 2 Kings xxiv. 2; next, almost immediately after Jehoiachin's accession in 597, a siege of Jerusalem by the Chaldæans, resulting, in the third month of Jehoiachin's reign, in the deportation of the king and the *élite* of the capital to Babylon; and finally—in consequence of Zedekiah's pursuing the same anti-Chaldæan policy as Jehoiachin, and refusing to listen to Jeremiah's counsels—the capture and destruction of Jerusalem, and second deportation of captives to Babylonia.

It is to be regretted that we have not further particulars of Nabopolassar's rule. Did we know more of the military expeditions in which he was engaged, we might be better able to appreciate Habakkuk's allusions to the prowess and conquests of the Chaldæans. As it is, almost the only exploit of the Chaldæans, prior to the two sieges of Jerusalem, of which we have actual information, is the victory over Necho at Carchemish. To judge from 2 Kings xxiv. 1, the Chaldæan arms were not seen in Judah itself before 602 B.C.—possibly, indeed, not before 598—according to the date at which the three years' vassalage mentioned in that verse terminated. Our knowledge of the times is not minute enough to enable us to fix dates with precision; but Hab. i. 5–11, it is natural to suppose, was written shortly after the battle of Carchemish in 605 (so Davidson), when the first rumours of the character and military capacities of the Chaldæans reached Judah, but before the formidable dimensions which their power would shortly ("in your days," v. 5) assume had yet been realized. Hab. i. 12 ff., ii., presupposing a time when the Chaldæans had made more conquests, and when men had become familiarized with their tyrannical treatment of subject nations, may have been written some years later, though before the end of the Chaldæan rule could be regarded as at all immediate, on account of ii. 3.

2. Tradition has much to tell of Habakkuk the prophet, but history has nothing. There are many legends, and few facts.

Later Judaism wove many curious apocryphal incidents around his name, but not one has a vestige of warrant, and they are not even interesting, because, in spite of the lack of biographical detail, the personality of this prophet, as it emerges from the pages he has left, is so vivid and arresting as to need no retouching. His utterances do more than lift a veil of history to show us a dark and perplexed period; they do more than plunge us into age-long questions raised over particular problems; they lift a veil from the prophet himself, and to understand the few pages of this Hebrew pamphlet is to know the essentials of a remarkable mind and character. These chapters are eloquent with personal revelation. If character can be told by hand-writing, much more is it told by heart-writing, and Habakkuk's utterances are of this order; vivid things flung out of a strong man's mind wrestling with problems too great for it. The man is in the manuscript, and among the many revelations of Habakkuk the prophet, his chief revelation is the revelation of himself.

Habakkuk was not a preacher like Jeremiah and Zephaniah. His prophecy shows no indications of having been delivered orally before it was committed to writing. He does not bear a message of warning to his guilty countrymen in the hope that even at the eleventh hour they may amend their ways and avert the impending punishment. It is possible indeed that, like Isaiah, he may have inscribed the oracle of consolation on a tablet, and exposed it in public, and explained its enigmatic utterance to any one who cared to inquire. But as a whole his book is the fruit of religious reflection; it exhibits the communing and questioning of his soul—representative no doubt of many other pious spirits of the time—with God; and records the answers which the Spirit of God taught him for his own sake and for the sake of tried souls in every age. These communings and questionings, these wrestlings of his spirit with God, were doubtless spread over some considerable time. It is not to be supposed that light was given at once. The book seems rather to be the result of a prolonged mental struggle. Through pain and perplexity, through wrestling with the actual problems of life around him, through the use of his intellect, but infinitely more through the use of his conscience, and best of all through purity of heart guiding a soul made true to God's great purposes in this world,

the Hebrew prophet received those Divine intuitions concerning the world's course and God's designs that mark out the Old Testament as a supernatural, inspired book.

3. The distinction of Habakkuk is not primarily in what he says, but in the direction he faces, the way he is looking. He is the earliest who is known to us of a new school of religion in Israel. He is called "prophet," but at first he does not adopt the attitude which is characteristic of the prophets. His face is set in an opposite direction to theirs. They address the nation Israel on behalf of God; he rather speaks to God on behalf of Israel. Their task was Israel's sin, the proclamation of God's doom and the offer of His grace to their penitence. Habakkuk's task is God Himself, the effort to find out what He means by permitting tyranny and wrong. They attack the sins, he is the first to state the problems, of life. This is the beginning of speculation in Israel.

I.

The Problem.

O Lord, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear? I cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save.—Hab. i. 2.

1. The book opens with a dialogue between the prophet and God, in which God is boldly but reverently challenged to defend His action in the government of the world. Habakkuk looks upon the utter destruction of Josiah's reforms—the downfall of pure religion; the return of idolatry, the very worst kind of idol-worship; sensuality eating away the very fabric of social life; injustice, unrighteousness, tyranny, oppression, breaking up the commonwealth—and the questions confront him: "Is God holding His people in His hands? Is God, through Israel, building up a kingdom here on earth? How can that be true when Israel has, on the one hand, sunk down into such sin and guilt; and, on the other, been brought into such utter subjection to a heathen power?"

The prophet's horizon is filled with wrong: Israel thrown into disorder, revelation paralysed, justice perverted. But, like Nahum,

Habakkuk feels not for Israel alone. The tyrant has outraged humanity. He "sweeps peoples into his net," and as soon as he empties this, he fills it again "ceaselessly," as if there were no just God above. He exults in his vast cruelty, and has success so unbroken that he worships the very means of it. In itself such impiety is gross enough, but to a heart that believes in God it is a problem of exquisite pain. Habakkuk's is the burden of the finest faith. He illustrates the great commonplace of religious doubt—that problems arise and become rigorous in proportion to the purity and tenderness of a man's conception of God. It is not the coarsest but the finest temperaments that are exposed to scepticism. Every advance in assurance of God or in appreciation of His character develops new perplexities in face of the facts of experience, and faith becomes her own most cruel troubler. Habakkuk's questions are not due to any cooling of the religious temper in Israel, but are begotten of the very heat and ardour of prophecy in its encounter with experience. His tremulousness, for instance, is impossible without the high knowledge of God's purity and faithfulness, which older prophets had achieved in Israel:

> "Art not thou of old, O LORD, my God, my Holy One,
> Purer of eyes than to behold evil,
> And incapable of looking upon wrong?"

His despair is that which comes only from eager and persevering habits of prayer:

> "How long, O LORD, have I called and thou hearest not!
> I cry to thee of wrong and thou givest no help!"

His questions, too, are bold with that sense of God's absolute power which flashed so bright in Israel as to blind men's eyes to all secondary and intermediate causes. "Thou," he says,—

> "Thou hast made men like fishes of the sea,
> Like worms that have no ruler,"

boldly charging the Almighty, in almost the temper of Job himself, with being the cause of the cruelty inflicted by the unchecked tyrant upon the nations; "for shall evil happen, and Jehovah not have done it?"

He was one of the first of path-finders through those dark

and tangled ways of doubt into which even good people fall sometimes, when their practical experience of human life seems to contradict the doctrines of their religion. He is one of the fathers of that great company of the speculative, who have not shirked before the contradictions which life seems to offer to faith, but have brought their brains to bear, sometimes with reverence and humility, and sometimes, alas! without either, upon the dark problems of life. As among the disciples stands Thomas, so among the prophets stands Habakkuk, a devout free-thinker. He dared to look round and ask what things meant; more than this, he dared to lift his fearless face to the heavens and ask what God meant.

This man, and his like, have helped to raise faith out of stagnation, and have constrained her to make sure that she was grappling herself to realities and not to shadows; they have helped to deliver her from the fetish of phrases which had ceased to hold living and operative ideas; and, as perhaps the greatest service of all, they have compelled the salutary discovery and admission that there are some things that even good people do not know, that not the wisest have seen all the paths that radiate from the throne of God, that there is a point where our little tapping staff of inquiry goes clean over the edge of things, and finds nothing that it can probe. And in compelling this discovery, he and those like him have done by no means their least service, for it is only when faith is taken off its feet that it discovers it has wings.

Perplext in faith, but pure in deeds,
At last he beat his music out.
There lives more faith in honest doubt,
Believe me, than in half the creeds.

He fought his doubts and gather'd strength,
He would not make his judgment blind,
He faced the spectres of the mind
And laid them: thus he came at length

To find a stronger faith his own;
And Power was with him in the night,
Which makes the darkness and the light,
And dwells not in the light alone,

But in the darkness and the cloud,
As over Sinai's peaks of old,
While Israel made their gods of gold,
Altho' the trumpet blew so loud.[1]

2. We can understand the prophet's impatience. There may be weakness in it, but it is also tinged with piety and patriotism. It is not all personal vexation. There is much real zeal and jealousy for the righteousness of God. The prophet is just as zealous for the vindication of Jehovah's character as for the honour and safety of his own nation. But God's demand is that the prophet must have patience. It is the prophet's duty to watch and wait. He can utter his complaint. Certainly there is no book where man's freedom of utterance is more fully vindicated than in the Old Testament. Every mood and passion of the soul finds full expression. So long as it is not mere self-conceit or idle fretfulness, it is good that man's complaint should be spoken and not cherished in sullen silence. When that is done the prophet can look longingly towards God. How dignified is this attitude! "I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will look forth to see what he will speak with me, and what answer he will give to my plea."

¶ Some of you have seen, on an ocean steamer, the officer of the watch on the bridge, peering out toward the horizon. Sometimes he cannot see a ship's length ahead; sometimes the sky is blue and serene before him; but always there is a man standing watch, to see what may meet him; and in the sense of that alertness on the bridge the passengers rest in peace below. Such is the discipline and preparedness which the voyage of life demands. We speak of such a man as being "on deck"; and the trouble with a great part of the religious world is that it is not on deck, but is snugly below, like cabin passengers, with no officer on the bridge. "I will stand upon my watch," says the prophet. No man can tell another when the exigencies of life are to arise or its storms of temptation to be met. No good seaman waits until the storm has struck to go on deck, and no mystery of experience is so startling as the abrupt, unanticipated, and surprising ways in which the shifting weather of life suddenly tests the human soul.

[1] Tennyson, *In Memoriam.*

Oh to be up and doing, O!
Unfearing and unshamed to go
In all the uproar and the press
About my human business!

But ye? O ye who linger still
Here in your fortress on the hill
With placid face, with tranquil breath,
The unsought volunteers of death,
Our cheerful General on high,
With careless looks may pass you by.[1]

3. To such anxious hope and earnest expectation an answer is not lacking. It comes in the promise of a vision, which, though it seem to linger, will not be later than the time fixed by God. A vision is something realized, experienced—something that will be as actual and present to the waiting prophet as the cruelty which now fills his sight.

¶ In December 1900 my father paid his last visit to Cambridge, to preach for the second time at the Trinity College Commemoration. In the Bishop's sermon the following passage occurs:

"In this Chapel and in these Courts fifty-six years ago I saw visions as it is promised that young men shall see them in the last days—visions which in their outward circumstances have been immeasurably more than fulfilled. I have had an unusually long working time, and I think unequalled opportunities of service. Where I have failed, as I have failed often and grievously, it has not been because I once saw an ideal, but because I have not looked to it constantly, steadily, faithfully; because I have distrusted myself and distrusted others; because again and again I have lost the help of sympathy, since I was unwilling to claim from those 'who called me friend' the sacrifice which I was myself ready to make. So now an old man I dream dreams of great hope, when I plead with those who will carry forward what my own generation has left unattempted or unaccomplished, to welcome the ideal which breaks in light upon them, the only possible ideal for man, even the fullest realization of self, the completest service of others, the devoutest fellowship with God: to strive towards it untiringly even if it seems 'to fade for ever and for ever as we move.'"[2]

[1] F. G. Peabody, *Mornings in the College Chapel*, ii. 138.

[2] A. Westcott, *Life and Letters of Brooke Foss Westcott*, ii. 327.

II.

The Solution.

Behold, his soul is puffed up, it is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.—Hab. ii. 4.

1. Habakkuk ascends his spiritual watch-tower to hear what Jehovah will say to the weary plaint of His prophet; and the answer comes. It is such that all may easily read it. The Divine truth revealed will not indeed be verified till the appointed time, but there can be no doubt that it will be verified, though long years should pass. "Though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not delay. Behold, his soul is puffed up, it is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith" (ii. 3, 4).

The first clause of ver. 4 describes the Chaldæan. His whole nature is inflated, presumptuous, insincere. It is essentially false and unreal; and therefore—so we must complete the sense by inference from the second clause—it has no principle of permanence; he is doomed to perish. But the righteous—Israel according to its calling, realized in the character of those godly men who even in the darkest days represented what Israel was designed to be—shall live in his faithfulness. "We shall not die," was Habakkuk's confident assurance, based upon the character of Jehovah; and this oracle is the Divine response to that confidence. For the true Israel his integrity, his trustworthiness, his constancy, the correspondence of his nature to God's eternal law, constitute a principle of permanence: he cannot perish but is destined to live, through all the cataclysms and convulsions which are to shake the world.

This is the sense of the words as they are used by Habakkuk. We must not anticipate the progress of revelation by supposing that "faith" in the full New Testament sense of the word is here revealed as the means of life. The Hebrew language indeed has no word which fully expresses the idea of faith as an active principle. Yet, since integrity of character and constancy in trouble could for the Israelite spring only from reliance on Jehovah, the thought of faith as an active principle is not far distant. St.

Paul takes the message, enlarges it, interprets it, and shows its fulfilment in the light of the gospel revelation.

¶ It is frequently said that trust and faith are the same thing, but it is not so in the Old Testament. According to the usage of the Hebrew Bible, trust is more nearly related to hope than it is to belief, and yet it springs out of belief. It makes the confident conviction of those who take God at His word. The reason of this is that so much of what we call Revelation has to do either with the unseen or with the future, both of which are beyond the ken of our natural faculties. Faith realizes the unseen; hope looks forward to the fulfilment of the promises; trust rests on Him who is the revealer of His own will and purposes.[1]

2. Here then lies the secret of the life of an Israelite; he shall live by his faith. Feeling and knowing himself to be nothing, he is obliged to cast himself wholly upon God. And anything which takes away that self-confidence and brings forth that faith is blessed is Divine, let the outward aspects of it be as dark, let the inward anguish which it produces be as terrible, as it may. Here is the solution of the riddles of the universe; here is the key to God's dark and inscrutable ways. Not a solution which we can resort to as if it were a formula of ready application, which may stifle questioning and set our minds at ease. Not a key such as empirics and diviners use, pretending that they know all the wards of every mystery and can open it at their pleasure, but one to which the humble and the meek can always resort when most baffled, when most ignorant—one which helps them to welcome their own tribulations, and to see in the tribulations of the world a sure witness that the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.

This is the climax of the great drama; but it is almost impossible to do justice to the wealth of Divine truth which the noble message contains. Briefly put, it suggests that ordinary human life is only a half-told story. God's purposes extend through the ages. The eternal principles of the Divine rule may not appear to be vindicated in one lifetime. Good men may die under a cloud, and bad men may live out their days in the sunshine; but nevertheless good is good and evil is evil. Worldly prosperity does not mean real happiness, and worldly suffering

[1] R. B. Girdlestone, *Old Testament Theology*, 125.

does not mean spiritual misery. Right is right, and wrong is wrong, to the end of the world; and, though a man die under suffering, it is better to be loyal and true to God than to be wicked and apparently to flourish. Pride and all sin carry in themselves their own doom, which surely comes sooner or later in one way or another. But faith in God and loyal faithfulness to Him always give poor humanity strength to wait and to endure also in one way or another.

In this spirit Habakkuk stands and waits. He writes the vision and makes it plain upon tables that he that runneth may read it; that men in after-days may know how their forefathers have suffered and sorrowed, and may know where they could not find and where they did find deliverance. He does not see to the end of the vision; he does not ask to see. There is yet an appointed time; to tarry is his task—yes, and his privilege.

¶ To most people the radiance and peaceful joy of his old age seemed so natural that they thought it came by nature. That was not so. By nature he was active, and even restless; there was in him the spirit "that bids not sit nor stand, but go"; by nature he was tempted to impatience; by nature he found it the hardest task in the world to keep within the limits of his shortened tether; and now and again there would gleam out a flash of the will that must be about the Father's business, and forgot that the Father's business was for him not doing, but to be still and see the salvation of the Lord. It was by the grace of Christ, by much prayer and striving, that he became trustful, peaceful, content to lie and wait the good time of the Lord. In his private litany the first grace for which he prayed was meekness.[1]

3. If the prophet's message, that "the just shall live by his faith," seems to us to be simple and commonplace, let us remember the toil and tears through which it came to him. It may be said that there is nothing new here, even according to his own statement. That was all implied in the belief in a righteous God which he professed. Just so. In the full, clear light of to-day it is easy for us to see that; but, as a matter of fact, it is only when a man is thrown back in doubt and agony upon his creed that he begins to realize its full meaning. The prophet joins in the most significant manner two things which Christian theology recognizes as

[1] J. L. Paton, *John Brown Paton* (1914), 518.

two aspects of the same sublime reality, personal faith in the righteous God and the clear perception of the moral order of the world. The superficial view is to say that in the face of pride and tyranny God is silent; He does nothing. Even the man of faith in hours of weakness hears this sinister whisper in his soul, "God is silent; He does nothing." The deeper thought that comes in the hour of meditation and prayer is that the Eternal is never silent, but ever-present and always active. It is true that the prophet refers to the future. The message is written plainly so that men's faith may be confirmed when future events cast their lurid light upon it, when it is read in the light of burning cities, and amid the crash of falling empires. He has also his great hope of a time when "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." But the great truth which has come to him, and in which he finds rest, is one of present application, namely this, that character decides destiny, sin is its own punishment. We are so familiar with this truth, and have had presented to us in so many forms the fact that whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap, that we do not easily feel how living and original it was to the prophet in his hour of wrestling.

¶ "Prisoner, tell me, who was it that bound you?"

"It was my master," said the prisoner. "I thought I could outdo everybody in the world in wealth and power, and I amassed in my own treasure-house the money due to my king. When sleep overcame me I lay upon the bed that was for my lord, and on waking up I found I was a prisoner in my own treasure-house."

"Prisoner, tell me who was it that wrought this unbreakable chain?"

"It was I," said the prisoner, "who forged this chain very carefully. I thought my invincible power would hold the world captive, leaving me in a freedom undisturbed. Thus night and day I worked at the chain with huge fires and cruel hard strokes. When at last the work was done and the links were complete and unbreakable, I found that it held me in its grip."[1]

4. The rest of the Book of Habakkuk proceeds with a forward rush. Hitherto the progress of thought in the mind of the prophet has been slow and painful, like that of a man who toils uphill and

[1] Rabindranath Tagore, *Gitanjali*, 24.

pauses often to cast a wavering glance on what is before, behind, and around him. When the summit is reached, and speculative doubts give place to definite conclusions, the time for thinking is past, and the time for action is come. It is pardonable in any thoughtful man to be long in finding a working faith; but, when once it has been found, he is a spiritual laggard if he does not proceed to act directly upon his hard-won and fixed beliefs. With a rush, then, Habakkuk goes on to predict the certain doom of the wicked oppressor. He makes the captive nations, in their outraged humanity, lift up the voice of woe and doom in a series of "taunt-songs," which are living with poetic force. They are given in five strophes which heap up the several accusations against the Chaldæans—for their rapacity, their selfish greed, their ambitious buildings, their insulting corruption of the nations, and their senseless idolatry. They do not merely manifest personal feeling; they express the judgment of God and predict the doom which has already begun to work itself out. Insatiable greed, unbridled lust, reckless extravagance, shameful cruelty, worship of one's own power—these sins against God and man carry in themselves the seeds of their own corruption. Just in so far as a nation is ruled in this spirit it is built upon a rotten foundation; its day of doom may seem to tarry, but it is in process of coming all the time. Its very success is its degradation; even before the height of ambition is reached, judgment comes by slow decay or sudden calamity.

This line of thought is exceedingly interesting. We have already seen in prophecy, and especially in Isaiah, the beginnings of Hebrew Wisdom—the attempt to uncover the moral processes of life and express a philosophy of history. But hardly anywhere have we found so complete an absence of all reference to the direct interference of God Himself in the punishment of the tyrant; for "the cup of the Lord's right hand" in ver. 16 is simply the survival of an ancient metaphor. These "proverbs," or "taunt-songs," in conformity with the proverbs of the later Wisdom, dwell only upon the inherent tendency to decay of all injustice. Tyranny, they assert, and history ever since has affirmed their truthfulness—tyranny is suicide.

III.

The Prophet's Prayer.

For though the fig tree shall not blossom,
Neither shall fruit be in the vines;
The labour of the olive shall fail,
And the fields shall yield no meat;
The flock shall be cut off from the fold,
And there shall be no herd in the stalls:
Yet I will rejoice in the Lord,
I will joy in the God of my salvation.—Hab. iii. 17, 18.

1. The third chapter of Habakkuk is at once a pæan and a prayer. In form it is a dramatic and dithyrambic poem, which illustrates the struggle of mind by which hope had been wrung out of calamity and fear. So far there had been no promise of immediate deliverance; indeed, the silence of the prophet on this head implied the inevitable continuance of the present calamities. He had pointed to faith and faithfulness as the only remedy. This was the answer which he had received from God, the only inference as to present duty that could be deduced from the certainty of the Divine supremacy. Hope for himself, hope for his nation lay in moral steadfastness. But that steadfastness might well be encouraged by the remembrance of God's marvellous deliverance of His people in days of old. And these are the thoughts that are to be poured forth in the hymns and prayers of the congregation assembled for worship. Whether the circumstances of Habakkuk's own day permitted the musical rendering of his magnificent hymn in the Temple or not, it was clearly well suited for public use, and, if it was not set to music by himself, it was so by a later hand as soon as the reviving fortunes of the Jews permitted.

2. The psalmist begins his poem with the words, "O Lord, I have heard the report of thee, and am afraid." This is the key-note of the psalm almost to the end. The story of Jehovah's doings for Israel in days of old fills his heart with such awe and reverence that he trembles to think of the terrible deeds He may yet do for the salvation of His people. Yet the suppliant prays

for this same wonder-working, personal interference of the Divine One. May Jehovah's work be revived in the midst of the years! May He make Himself known in wrath to Israel's oppressors, but in mercy towards Israel itself!

Then follows a magnificent theophany or manifestation of the Divine Presence in the world. It is an ideal picture of Jehovah's appearance on the earth, moulded on the lines of heroic history, and descriptive of Israel's marvellous past. The whole thought of the Book of Habakkuk rises up and bursts out with a tremendous glory of exultant music in this majestic poem, which pictures God's omnipotent, resistless sovereignty; God's glorious march through the world's story in the past; God's everlasting sovereignty still; God's truth, justice, mercy.

3. The prophet saw that evil was at hand, and unavoidable; he submitted to the dispensation of God, whose Spirit enabled him to paint it in all its calamitous circumstances. He knew that God was merciful and gracious, and he trusted to His promise, though all appearances were against its fulfilment. He knew that the word of Jehovah could not fail, and therefore his confidence was unshaken. No paraphrase can add anything to this hymn, which is full of inexpressible dignity and elegance, leaving even its unparalleled piety out of the question. In it all the elements —the contending emotions, the doubts, the fears, the hopes, the longings of Habakkuk's spiritual experience and wrestling for faith—find their complete, perfect utterance, and their triumphant consummation, in a quiet trust, which will not be dismayed amid the clash and fall of nations and of empires; but which, when all the human props and supports of confidence have given way, can still rest peaceful and happy in the reality and being of God. He built his altar of praise upon no foundation of a carefully calculated surplus of credit over debit. He even erected it upon a basis of entire and irreparable loss, and with his offering he lifted up his voice in jubilant thanksgiving. He was careless of consistency, of logic, even of common sense—the things which the world adores. Though all the treasures of life took wings, he would yet sing his songs of gladness. Men might marvel and exclaim, but he knew, and he was satisfied. He had the inner wealth which no outer calamity could touch; therefore he

surveyed, without repining and without despair, the loss of all earth counted dear.

¶ Just before Sir Thomas More was made Lord Chancellor, and while he was reporting the result of his mission to the Netherlands to the King at Woodstock, a messenger came to tell him that part of his home at Chelsea, and all his barns, then full of corn, were burned down. On hearing the tidings, he wrote thus to his wife: "Mistress Alyce, in my most hearty will, I recommend me to you. And whereas I am informed of the loss of our barns, and our neighbours' also, with all the corn that was therein, albeit (saving God's pleasure) it is a great pity of so much good corn lost, yet, since it hath pleased Him to send us such a chance, we are most bounden, not only to be content, but also to be glad of His visitation. He sent us all that we have lost; and since He hath by such a chance taken it away again, His pleasure be fulfilled. Let us never grudge thereat, but take it in good worth, and *heartily thank* Him, as well for *adversity* as *prosperity*. And peradventure we have more cause to thank Him for our loss than for our winning. For His wisdom better seeth what is good for us than we do ourselves. Therefore, I pray you be of *good cheer*, and take all the household with you to church, and there thank God, both for that He hath given us, and for that He hath left us, which, if it please Him, He can increase when He will. And if it please Him to leave us yet less, at His pleasure be it. I pray you also to make some good search what my poor neighbours have lost, and bid them take no thought therefore, for if I should not leave myself a spoon, there shall be no poor neighbour of mine bear loss by any chance happened in my house."

4. While this is a study of Old Testament times, in Christ its experience is made more sure. The great principles of this Old Testament story abide, but in Christ we have the ratification of everything that we find suggested here. All the arguments in favour of the prophet's rejoicing in the midst of desolation are made more certain and more strong by Christ. Supposing all be swept away on which we depend, our Master is able to create for our sustenance. He has resources of which we know nothing. He can lay His multiplying hand upon five loaves and two small fishes so that a multitude be fed. If this transient, physical life shall wither, and droop, and die, still there is the infinite music of the Master's voice: "Lo, I am with you all the days, even unto the consummation of the age." If Habakkuk rejoiced in what,

comparatively, was twilight only, how much more shall we rejoice in Christ, the glory of the only Begotten! "Rejoice in the Lord alway, and again I say, Rejoice." How shall we climb to the prophet's high place of triumph? First by a recognition of the fact that amid all the conditions that confront us Christ is at work; then by waiting; and, lastly, by the deep communion of faith. Our joy is in proportion to our trust; our trust is commensurate with our knowledge of Him. To know Him is to trust Him. May we be led into the fuller knowledge, and so find the fuller faith, and thus learn the fuller joy!

Though vine nor fig-tree neither
  Their wonted fruit should bear;
Though all the fields should wither,
  Nor flocks nor herds be there;
Yet, God the same abiding,
  His praise shall tune my voice;
For, while in Him confiding,
  I cannot but rejoice.[1]

[1] W. Cowper.

ZEPHANIAH.

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ZEPHANIAH.

The day of the Lord is at hand.—Zeph. i. 7.

THE great creative minds, the original leaders of the highest movements, are few; hence we must not undervalue the prophets and teachers of secondary rank who, according to their capacity, develop and apply the truth that has been given. After the preaching of the four great prophets, the judgment that confirmed it, and the attempted reformation that came out of it, there was a violent reaction marked by gloomy superstition and bitter persecution. Between these dark days under Manasseh and the new reforming movement under Josiah, Zephaniah exercised his ministry. The book ascribed to him is a small one, but it is sufficient to show that he is a disciple—that is, he is dependent upon his predecessors and especially upon the great Isaiah—and, further, that he has distinct individuality; the fragment of truth that he does grasp he uses effectively for practical purposes.

1. The date of Zephaniah's prophetic activity, according to the superscription, was in the reign of King Josiah (639–608 B.C.). Scholars, with one exception, have accepted this as correct. There is no good reason to suspect the statement; it accords well with the contents of the book, yet it could not easily have been conjectured upon the basis of the book. It is natural to suppose that it rests upon an independent tradition that goes back to fairly early times. The question that may profitably be discussed concerns itself with the particular portion of Josiah's reign to which the prophecy should be assigned. Did Zephaniah do his work before or after the culmination of the great Deuteronomic reform in 621 B.C.? The answer to this question must be sought in the prophet's own statements as to the conditions prevailing in Judah in his day and in his outlook for the future. His denuncia-

tions of syncretism in worship, apostasy from Jehovah, the worship of the heavenly bodies, the aping of foreign customs in religion and in dress, and the practical scepticism rebuked in i. 12 seem to accord perfectly with the state of affairs as it was during the reigns of Manasseh and Amon, and as it may be supposed to have continued during the early portion of Josiah's reign, before he had arrived at an age when he could exercise any powerful influence upon the currents of life and thought in his kingdom. Efforts have been made to account for the conditions reflected by Zephaniah's utterances as indicative of the period of Josiah's reign after 621 B.C. But it seems improbable that such irregularities of cultus could have been openly practised and tolerated in the period immediately after a reform the main outcome of which was the purification of the cultus. Josiah was a zealous worshipper of Jehovah, and no record has reached us of any cooling of his zeal after the reform. Passages from Jeremiah are sometimes cited to show that conditions were as bad in Judah after the reform as they are declared to have been by Zephaniah in his day. But this argument is inconclusive; and other considerations urged in favour of the post-reformation date also fail to make it probable. The Book of Zephaniah is almost bound to have been written before the year of the great reformation.

2. The occasion of Zephaniah's appearance as a prophet seems to have lain in some imminent danger to his nation. He evidently regarded the Day of Jehovah as close at hand. In accordance with the character of earlier prophecy in general and of the Day of Jehovah prophecies in particular, it is probable that Zephaniah interpreted the approach of some foreign army as heralding the dawn of Jehovah's Day. The event that best meets the requirements of the situation is the Scythian invasion, about the year 630 B.C. The widespread activity of the Scythians corresponds with Zephaniah's vision of the coming judgment as extending from Assyria on the north-east to Ethiopia on the south-west. The speed with which the Scythian hordes swept everything before them seems reflected in certain of Zephaniah's utterances. That neither Assyria nor Egypt was thought of by Zephaniah as the agent or forerunner of the coming judgment is clear from the fact that they are both represented as falling victims to it. These

being out of the question, the Scythians remain as the most likely candidate for the doubtful honour of world-destroyer. It is not necessary to suppose that Zephaniah conceived of them as exhausting the Divine anger in their chastisement of the nations. They seem rather to have been thought of as furnishing the prelude to the great drama of destruction. Human and Divine forces were to co-operate in this as in other judgment scenes depicted by the prophets. In the approach of the Scythians Zephaniah saw signs of the breaking up of the existing world-powers and hastened to proclaim it as the great judgment day of Jehovah, the God of Israel and the God of justice.

3. The style of Zephaniah is forcible, but his prophetic message is far less definite than that of Isaiah. Isaiah wrote under the pressure of immense political events, and deals directly with the Assyrian invasion. The menaces of Zephaniah are vague and general. Probably, however, Zephaniah neither intended nor desired to be definite. He, too, is the prophet of inevitable laws; an announcer of that light which shines so quietly, but ultimately reveals all things "in the slow history of their ripening." All the Hebrew prophets have certain great fundamental ideas in common. Even Isaiah, original as he is, sometimes echoes the phrases of Amos and Hosea; and Jeremiah frequently borrows or adapts the expressions of his predecessors. Zephaniah, whose prophecy is more secondary and reproductive, borrows not only principles but details. He assumes that history will repeat itself in fresh catastrophes, followed by new reformations and restorations, since the calamity of the Ninevite invasion had not produced a genuine reform, and the deliverance then promised was still incomplete. His eschatology is spiritual and ethical; and he predicts, not only the vindication of righteousness, but the triumph of Jehovah's love. But his book is on the model of those left by his predecessors. Threatening, exhortation, and promise are interwoven with triple strands into his pages as into theirs.

Zephaniah can hardly be considered great as a poet. He does not rank with Isaiah or even with Hosea in this particular. He has no great imaginative powers; no deep insight into the human heart is reflected in his utterances or any keen sensitiveness to

the beauties of nature. His harp is not attuned to the finer harmonies of life like that of Jeremiah. He had an imperative message to deliver, and he proceeded in the most direct and forceful way to discharge his responsibility. What he lacked in grace and charm he in some measure atoned for by the vigour and clarity of his speech. He realized the approaching terror so keenly that he was able to present it vividly and convincingly to his hearers. No prophet has made the picture of the Day of Jehovah more real.

4. Zephaniah himself, perhaps, belonged to the royal house, for he traces his descent from Hezekiah, whom we may without extravagance identify with the famous king of that name. A whole generation had passed since the preaching of Isaiah had effected a reformation in the society of Jerusalem, and—as ever happens in the wake of great spiritual movements—there had followed a period of reaction. The upper classes of Judah, from whom the leading politicians were drawn, were exhibiting the too familiar traits of a decadent society. There was much latent scepticism, a tendency to dishonest compromise, a contempt for conviction, a dislike of religion as a factor in practical politics. Together with this decay of the spiritual elements in life, there went inevitably a rapid declension of manners, a lowering of the moral standard, a decline of genuine public spirit. Zephaniah had been brought up within the charmed circle of privilege and wealth, and when he was moved to denounce the prevailing tendencies of his class and time, he could speak out of the personal knowledge which he possessed. Hence, perhaps, the lifelike description which he draws, and hence, also, the almost personal resentment which seems to colour his language.

5. Critical study of the contents of the book during the last half-century has resulted in the setting apart of certain portions of the text as belonging neither to Zephaniah nor to his times, but as due to accretion in later days. With the exception of the Song of the Redeemed (iii. 14–20), however, it may be accepted generally as the work of the prophet. The main outline of the book is very simple. In the first chapter the prophet announces a great day of the wrath of the Lord. He then calls upon the

various peoples, and especially upon Jerusalem, to repent, mingling his appeals with stern denunciations of judgment. Finally, he promises a time of peace and Divine favour for the remnant of Israel, "an afflicted and poor people."

I.

The Menace.

The great day of the Lord is near, it is near and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the Lord.—Zeph. i. 14.

It was the consciousness that there was a God that made Zephaniah look to the dark restless north and read there the portents of coming judgment. He sees the day of doom approaching, and he anticipates its gloom and its terror. In realistic language he depicts supernatural agencies taking part with the war of men in this visitation of Heaven. With stern words he declares the purport of the Almighty in thus wreaking His wrath upon the earth. The tumult, the earthquake shock, the noise of warfare, and the red fires of judgment are the means by which Jehovah will make known to all His holy name as a just, righteous, and jealous God, the one great Ruler of the world, sovereign in power over all other gods.

1. The fiercest of all the prophets, Zephaniah begins with the sweeping threat, "I will utterly consume all things from the earth, saith the Lord," and then he proceeds to mete out to each class of offenders the punishment that is their due. In truth the condition of Jerusalem was such as to call for judgment. Zephaniah lived in Jerusalem. We descry him against her, almost as clearly as we descry Isaiah. In the glare and smoke of the conflagration which his vision sweeps across the world, only her features stand out definite and particular: the flat roofs with men and women bowing in the twilight to the host of heaven, the crowds of priests, the nobles and their foreign fashions; the *Fishgate*, the New or *Second* Town, where the rich lived, the *Heights*, to which building had at last spread, and between them the hollow *Mortar*, with its markets, Phœnician

merchants and money-dealers. In the first few verses of Zephaniah we see almost as much of Jerusalem as in the whole book either of Isaiah or of Jeremiah.

¶ Jerusalem became the bride of Kings and the mother of Prophets. The Prophets, sons only of that national and civic life of which the Kings had made her the centre, repaid her long travail and training of their genius by the supreme gift of an answer to the enigmas of her life: blew by their breath into imperishable flame the meaning of her tardy and ambiguous history. She knew herself chosen of God, a singular city in the world, with a mission to mankind. And though her children became divided between the stupid pride in her privilege and a frequent apostasy to other faiths, for she had heathen blood in her from the beginning, God never left Himself without witnesses in her midst, nor ceased to strive with her. She felt His Presence, she was adjured of His love and, as never another city on earth has been, of His travail for her worthiness of the destiny to which He had called her. Nowhere else has the universal struggle between the Spirit of God and the spirit of man been waged so consciously, so articulately as in Jerusalem. Nowhere else have its human responsibilities and its Divine opportunities been so tragically developed. The expostulations of souls like Jeremiah's and Habakkuk's with the decrees of Providence and the burdens of Its will have been answered from their own hearts, and those of other prophets, in the assurance of an infinitely more anxious travail and agony waged by God Himself with reluctant man for the understanding of His will, the persuasion of His mercy, and the acceptance of His discipline towards higher stages of character and vision. It is to-day the subject of half the world's worship, and of the wonder of the rest, that both these elements in the long religious history of Jerusalem culminated and were combined in the experience of Jesus Christ within and around her walls: on the one hand, in His passionate appeals to the City to turn to Him, as though all the sovereign love and fatherly yearning of God were with Him; and on the other, in His Temptation, His agony of submission to the Divine will, and His Crucifixion. So that Sion and Olivet, the Wilderness and Gethsemane, their earthly meanings almost forgotten, have become the names of eternal facts in the history of the relations of God and man.[1]

2. The state of society described was certainly woeful and degraded. The land was full of foreign priests, the Chemarim,

[1] G. A. Smith, *Jerusalem*, i. 4.

the black-robed, ascetic ministers of the order and religion of Baal, and foreign troops, the Cherethites and Pelethites, Philistine mercenaries like the Swiss guards of the French court and the Vatican. These strangers had filled the land with idolatrous practices and confusion. The Chemarim of Baal had gradually and increasingly corrupted the pure religion of Jehovah, while the lawless behaviour of the guards had thrown the country into a panic. The land was filled with groves and idols, or, as they were called, Mazzebahs and Asherahs, stone pillars and consecrated poles. And at the high places of the rites of Judah these Chemarim, by order of Manasseh and Amon, burnt incense to Baal, the sun, moon, and stars. The Temple, built nearly four hundred years before, was closed. Its walls were decaying, and its chambers were neglected by all save a few faithful priests and Levites like Hilkiah, who were engaged in copying out and editing the ancient documents of the law which they had preserved with a jealous and laudable care. The Holy Ark was "a burden on their shoulders," constantly carried from one place of safety to another, lest it should be seized and destroyed. Beside the walls of the Temple, even within its sacred precincts, were the dwellings of the most abandoned creatures, the Kedeshim, devotees of Baal, whose shameless lives and practices in the name of religion were an insult and a defilement to the holy place.

The terrible influence of such examples had spread with havoc among the people of Jerusalem. Many had been seduced to bow down to the host of heaven on their house-tops. Others were wavering. They swore both by Moloch and by Jehovah. Others were sunk in a state of torpor or indifferentism, without interest, life or motion, like "a standing pool," or, as the Hebrews described it, "like wine that had settled on its lees." These urged as an excuse for their own sloth that Jehovah cares not—"He will do nothing, good or bad"—and therefore they did not seek or inquire of Him. The metaphor is clear. New wine was left upon its lees only long enough to fix its colour and body. If not then drawn off, it grew thick and syrupy—sweeter indeed than the strained wine, and to the taste of some more pleasant, but weak and ready to decay. "To settle upon one's lees" became a proverb for sloth, indifference, and the muddy mind. "Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and he hath settled on his lees, and hath not been

emptied from vessel to vessel; therefore his taste remaineth in him, and his scent is not changed" (Jer. xlviii. 11). The characters stigmatized by Zephaniah are also obvious. They were a precipitate from the ferment of fifteen years back. Through the cruel days of Manasseh and Amon, hope had been stirred and strained, emptied from vessel to vessel, and so had sprung sparkling and keen into the new days of Josiah. But no miracle came, only ten years of waiting for the king's majority and five more of small, tentative reforms. Nothing Divine happened. There were but the ambiguous successes of a small party who had secured the king for their principles. Of course disappointment ensued—disappointment and listlessness. The new security of life became a temptation; persecution ceased, and religious men lived again at ease. So numbers of eager and sparkling souls who had been in the front of the movement fell away into a selfish and idle obscurity. The prophet hears God say, "I must search Jerusalem with lights" in order to find them. They had "fallen from the van and the freemen"; they had "sunk to the rear and the slaves," where they wallowed in the excuse that Jehovah Himself "would do nothing"—"neither good," therefore it is useless to attempt reform like Josiah and his party, "nor evil," therefore Zephaniah's prophecy of destruction is also vain.

¶ Beyond a doubt there is a great deal of moral scepticism in our own time and in regard to our own lives. The greater hindrance to the progress of the Kingdom of God lies not in the outrageous and notable sins. Those who truly have the cause of God at heart, those who have the strong and progressive righteousness, they could make their way, they could make victorious battles against prominent atheism, against declared immorality; but that which for ever clogs the chariot wheels of the Kingdom of God is that hidden vast middle-class, that intermediate class of those who will not come out into the open one way or the other, that great class which Dante saw first when he had entered the gates of Hell, the spirits who were not rebellious, nor faithful, but were for themselves. "Hateful, distasteful to God and to His enemies"—the class of the morally sceptical, and those who think it is not worth while.[1]

¶ Do you remember the story of the part Sir Gawain played in the Quest for the Holy Grail? Like the other knights of King

[1] Bishop C. Gore.

Arthur's court, he set out in search of the Holy Thing—which is really only a symbolical way of saying that Sir Gawain, too, started with the ideal of a great and holy and Christlike life. But he soon wearied of the quest, and, finding a silk pavilion in the field and merry maidens in it, he abandoned the quest, and spent his twelve months and a day in sensuous ease and pleasure. And, on his return to King Arthur's court, he scoffs at the very idea of the quest. "It is a madness," he says,

> But by mine eyes and by mine ears I swear,
> I will be deafer than the blue-eyed cat,
> And thrice as blind as any noonday owl,
> To holy virgins in their ecstasies,
> Henceforward.

Gawain is just a picture of the man who has "thickened on his lees," who has surrendered his early ideals and hopes and betaken himself to a materialistic and sensual life. It is a peril to which we are all exposed. As the years pass we are apt to think that money, and comfort, and pleasure are the only things worth having, and, like Sir Gawain, we scoff at the "holy ecstasies" of our own youth. We think this cynicism is a mark of worldly wisdom and experience of life. But I will tell you what it really is: it is the death of the soul! The Christian never "thickens on his lees"; he never surrenders his ideals. "Your old men shall dream dreams." To the very end he is aspiring, pressing forwards, striving upwards; to the last, life for him is full of eagerness and zest, and hope. It is with him a case of

> Forward all the life time
> Climb from height to height,
> Till the head be hoary,
> Till the eve be light.[1]

3. For all this wickedness and indifference Zephaniah sees prepared the Day of the Lord—"*dies iræ, dies illa*," that day of wrath, trouble and distress, of gloom, clouds and thick darkness, when men shall stumble and stagger like blind men, because they have sinned against the Lord. The storm of judgment strikes Jerusalem first: it is infinitely searching; there is no possibility of escape, no means of redemption for the men who have sinned against Jehovah. Zephaniah sets forth the judgment in a startling

[1] J. D. Jones, *The Unfettered Word*, 180.

form: It is "the day of Jehovah's sacrifice." "Jehovah hath prepared a sacrifice, he hath bid his guests." The prophet sees the weird picture and makes it stand out clearly by a few sharp strokes. Judah is the victim in a sacrificial meal; the slaughter is complete; her enemies gather now in solemn silence round the altar. The grim idea is not altogether new, but the prophet is not a smooth imitator of other men's illustrations.

¶ Objection is taken to the retributive aspect of punishment on the ground that God, in Christ's revelation, is no longer looked on as Judge, but as *Father*. Ritschl, going deeper, would deny punitive justice to God as contradictory of His character as love. Neither objection can be readily sustained. St. Paul also, while upholding retribution, knew well that God was Father; Jesus, revealing the Father, gave sternest expression to the truth that God is likewise Judge. God is indeed Father: Fatherhood is expressive of His inmost heart in relation to a world of beings made originally in His own image. But Fatherhood is not the whole truth of God's relation to the world. There is another relation which He sustains than that of Father—the relation of Moral Ruler and Holy Judge—Founder, Upholder, Vindicator, of that moral order to which our own consciences and the whole constitution of things bear witness,—and it is this relation which, once sin has entered, comes into view, and claims to have its rights accorded to it. It was not as Father that St. Paul wrote of God, "Then how shall God judge the world?" "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men."[1]

4. For so young a man, the vision of Zephaniah may seem strangely dark and final. He is pitilessly true to his great keynote: "I will utterly consume all things from off the land. I will consume man and beast." No deadlier book lies in all the Old Testament. Neither dew nor grass nor tree nor any blossom lives in it; it is everywhere fire, smoke and darkness, drifting chaff, ruins, nettles, saltpits, and owls and ravens looking from the windows of desolate palaces. One vivid trait comes in like a screech upon the hearts of a people unaccustomed for years to war. "Hark, Jehovah's Day!" cries the prophet. "A strong man—there!—crying bitterly." From this flash upon the concrete he returns to a great vague terror, in which earthly armies merge in

[1] J. Orr, *Sin as a Problem of To-day*, 266.

heaven; battle, siege, storm and darkness are mingled, and destruction is spread abroad upon the whole earth.

¶ Oliver Cromwell did believe in God's Judgments; and did not believe in the rose-water plan of Surgery: in Oliver's time there was yet no distracted jargon of "abolishing Capital Punishments," of Jean-Jacques Philanthropy, and universal rose-water in this world still so full of sin. Men's notion was, not for abolishing punishments, but for making laws just; God the Maker's Laws, they considered, had not yet got the Punishment abolished from them! Men had a notion, that the difference between Good and Evil was still considerable;—equal to the difference between Heaven and Hell. It was a true notion. Which all men yet saw, and felt in all fibres of their existence, to be true. Only in late decadent generations, fast hastening towards radical change or final perdition, can such indiscriminate mashing-up of Good and Evil into one universal patent-treacle, and most unmedical electuary, of Rousseau Sentimentalism, universal Pardon and Benevolence, with dinner and drink and one cheer more, take effect in our earth. Electuary very poisonous, as sweet as it is, and very nauseous; of which Oliver, happier than we, had not yet heard the slightest intimation even in dreams.[1]

II.

The Admonition.

Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgement; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger.—Zeph. ii. 3.

1. The prophet's mood takes another turn. He implores the people to repent before that day of the Lord come upon them. (This point of transition is obscured by the Authorized Version—"Gather yourselves together," where the real meaning, as Rosenmüller has pointed out, is "Carefully examine your souls and be ashamed." Fuerst renders it "Play the man.") Then the prophet adds soothingly, "Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgement; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger"—a passage which is suspected for the lateness of

[1] Carlyle, *Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches*, ii. 143.

its ring and the religious sense of "meek," and which, indeed, hardly belongs to this portion of the prophecy, but is confessedly the highest word on the religious life in the Old Testament.

¶ Repentance is a principle of hope and a pledge of restoration through return to God. Lacerated pride is a principle of despair: the self on which it relied has failed, and there is no other strength within its view. Repentance, then, is essentially different from sorrow at having to suffer, and from self-contempt at having failed. Repentance is sorrow for having offended the love of God: and we must add, that, where repentance exists, full forgiveness follows. . . . Repentance must go before forgiveness: and the sorrow in which repentance consists must be real suffering, deeply felt and patiently endured. The acuteness of the suffering is the measure of our repentance; and repentance is the guarantee of forgiveness.[1]

2. Note the absence of all mention of the Divine mercy as the cause of deliverance. Zephaniah has no gospel of that kind. The conditions of escape are sternly ethical—meekness, the doing of justice and righteousness. His view of God insists on a rigid adherence to the principles of morality, which the purity, justice, and righteousness of God undoubtedly require of His subjects. Acknowledgment of the sovereignty of Jehovah will therefore naturally result in a humble worship and a moral life. According to the view of this prophet, God rules by fear, and only by chastisement can erring men be brought to worship and to live as they ought. It is a stern gospel, but it is earnest, virile, and rigidly moral. This austerity is largely the result of Zephaniah's faith and moral convictions. He has a marvellous grip of universal history, and the Divine Providence is recognized by him in the movements of great nations. These are but the instruments of the Almighty Ruler over all, and fulfil His great purposes. Divine judgment falls universally upon them, because they do not acknowledge the power of the God Jehovah. It falls most heavily on Judah, because its people, notwithstanding their special privileges, are false and faithless to Him. Nothing but the fires of judgment can proclaim the Divine sovereignty and bring all people to their true attitude towards Jehovah. The meek and the humble alone can live before Him and secure His Divine protection.

[1] Bishop A. Chandler, *Ara Cœli.*

¶ The conception of God in His world, not as the mere spectator of the fulfilment of His own immutable decrees, but as the Lord of Hosts, presiding over the great scene of conflict between good and evil in the souls of men who can only attain to real holiness through real liberty, and warring mightily on the side of good in order that it may win the victory, infinitely exalts and glorifies Him. We see Him in the teaching of Jesus, as the High Captain of the armies of love, working salvation in the midst of the earth, pleading with men to accept His mercy, warning them to escape from His judgments, sustaining the good in their goodness, overthrowing the wicked in their wickedness, bringing light out of darkness and triumph out of defeat, amid all strifes and storms maintaining His kingdom of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. His sovereignty embraces human liberty as the ocean surrounds an island. His sovereignty upholds human liberty as the air upholds a flying bird. His sovereignty defends human liberty as the authority of a true king defends the liberty of his subjects,—nay, rather, as the authority of a father tenderly and patiently respects and protects the spiritual freedom of his children in order that they may learn to love and obey him gladly and of their own accord. For this is the end of God's sovereignty: that His kingdom may come; that His will may be done on earth,—not as it is done in the circling of the stars or in the blossoming of flowers,—but as it is done in heaven, where created spirits freely strike the notes that blend in perfect harmony with the music of the Divine Spirit.[1]

3. The permanent value of such a message is proved by the thirst which we feel even to-day for the clear, cold water of its simple promises. Where a glaring optimism prevails, and the future is preached with a loud assurance, where many find their only religious enthusiasm in the resurrection of mediæval ritual or the singing of stirring and gorgeous hymns of second-hand imagery, how needful to be recalled to the earnestness and severity of life, to the simplicity of the conditions of salvation, and to their ethical, not emotional, character! Where sensationalism has so invaded religion, how good to hear the sober insistence upon God's daily commonplaces—"morning by morning he bringeth forth his judgment to light"—and to know that the acceptance of discipline is what prevails with Him. Where national reform is vaunted and the progress of education, how well to go

[1] H. van Dyke, *The Gospel for an Age of Doubt*, 270.

back to a prophet who ignored all the great reforms of his day that he might impress his people with the indispensableness of humility and faith. Where Churches have such large ambitions for themselves, how necessary to hear that the future is destined for *a poor folk*, the meek and the honest. Where men boast that their religion—Bible, Creed, or Church—has undertaken to save them, "vaunting themselves on the mount of my holiness," how needful to hear salvation placed upon character and a very simple trust in God.

¶ Action may be formally and even morally correct without rendering its agent good; whereas goodness of character ensures good conduct. A man may tell the truth a hundred times, and for various reasons, without being a truthful man. But an essentially truthful man cannot but tell the truth. And so what we are is ethically more important than what we do. This importance of character in relation to conduct is obvious when once stated, and has been recognized by all the great ethical systems, but it is tacitly ignored in much that passes muster for morality in the rough-and-ready estimate of the ordinary world. For men are very apt to lead departmental lives, and, if they do their duty in that department which meets the public eye, they are allowed higher moral rank than in fact they deserve. Thus a man may be a brave soldier, or an able statesman, or a just judge, or a skilful surgeon, or an honest merchant, and be accepted accordingly, without, all the while, being a good man. And however useful such men may be to society, and rightly recognized as such, their total effect is, in many subtle and imperceptible ways, to lower and confuse the moral standard of the world. There is always need, therefore, for the protest that no amount of externally good conduct, however praiseworthy in itself, can take the place of a good will—a will, that is to say, which does not merely will this or that particular good action, but goodness for its own sake, goodness as such; or, in other words, a good character.[1]

4. Next follows an elegy or dirge, rising occasionally to a wild ecstasy of denunciation. The threatened doom will engulf, he declares, in succession the Philistines, Moab and Ammon, Ethiopia, and even Nineveh, the proud Assyrian capital, itself. From Nineveh the prophet turns again to address Jerusalem, and describes afresh the sins rampant in her, especially the sins of her judges and great men, and her refusal to take warning from

[1] J. R. Illingworth, *Christian Character* (ed. 1904), 29.

the example of her neighbours. The threat against Assyria and Nineveh, its chief city, was not new. About this period it received its strongest and most passionate expression in the prophecy of Nahum. One can understand how, after the tyranny and cruelty of Assyria, and after Isaiah's teaching that though Jehovah might use the proud empire He would punish it, the people of Judah came to look upon this particular foreign power as the personification of wickedness. The judgment of the world has as one of its chief features the destruction of Nineveh. A century later Babylon came to occupy this place in the thoughts of Jewish patriots, but as yet the Babylonian conquest with all its horrors is still in the future. This prediction is not a mere cry for revenge, but an expression of faith in a righteous Ruler who will bring the proud nation to account for its many crimes.

The prophet spoke, and in fact it happened that judgment fell; the nations passed. Israel was chastised; it went into captivity. And there did come back that meek, that poor, that lowly, that afflicted people, despised even of the Samaritans—those feeble Jews. They came back trusting in Jehovah; they laid the foundations of that piteous and miserable new Temple. Its very foundations caused contempt; those who remembered the old Temple could but weep. But this new Temple was to be clothed with a glory which the old Temple had never known. It was the religion of humanity that was to come out from that regenerated and purged people—that little band of the meek of the earth. It happened in fact. It happened over again when Israel had become proud and haughty; once more, and once again, Mary sang her *Magnificat* in the glory of her royal heart—"He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted the humble and meek." And, once again, it was the unknown and the meek, it was Simeon and Anna, it was Joseph and Mary, it was the despised of Nazareth, who formed the seed of God's new Israel. Such is the glorious result of the discipline of the Lord. An evil and corrupt people passes through the ordeal of purification and affliction, and comes forth united, strong, full of trust in the Lord, no longer lifted up with pride, no longer boastful of wealth, but meek, and poor, and true.

¶ However much pessimists, like Schopenhauer and Hartmann, may rail at the suffering, as distinct from the sin, that is in the

world, it is an incontestable fact of experience that suffering can fashion human character as nothing else can do. Bacon and Shakespeare are no mean authorities where a knowledge of human nature is concerned; and we are all familiar with Shakespeare's "Sweet are the uses of adversity," while Bacon forcibly says, "Prosperity is the blessing of the Old Testament; adversity is the blessing of the New." "That misery does not make all virtuous," says Dr. Johnson, "experience too clearly informs us; but it is no less certain that of what virtue there is, misery produces far the greater part." These are not the words of morose fanatics, but of thoughtful men of the world. And an equally impartial modern moralist makes the striking observation that "the older men grow in life, the more work becomes their real play, and suffering their real work."

We cannot help feeling at times that there are deeper reasons for this than we yet understand; but at the same time those which we can understand are very plain. In the first place, self-will is the root of all the sin that we have to overcome; and the patient acceptance of events which conflict sharply with our self-will is often a more powerful remedy for it than even voluntary self-denial, since it involves a greater effort, and is less liable to be tainted by any admixture of pride, which has so often in the history of asceticism brought back the old self in a new form. It is therefore the best cure for self-will. But, further, the Christian, as such, believes in a particular providence, and therefore that his misfortunes represent not merely the incidence upon him of general laws, but God's personal will for him in particular. Their acceptance, therefore, is a direct acquiescence in God's will, a union of the will with God. And further again than this, it is in times of trouble that men most immediately feel their need of Divine assistance. And this leads them to prayer, wherein not the will only, but their whole personality, seeks union with God —seeks it, and, as those alone know who have so sought it in the way of sorrows, finds it in a degree that language has no power to express. "It is good for me that I have been in trouble," says the Psalmist, "that I might learn thy statutes." "Before I was troubled I went wrong: but now have I kept thy testimonies."

And this is the universal verdict of the religious consciousness.[1]

[1] J. R. Illingworth, *Christian Character* (ed. 1904), 52.

III.

The Promise.

But I will leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord. The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth: for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid.—Zeph. iii. 12, 13.

1. In a second address to his city (iii. 1–13), Zephaniah strikes the same notes as he did in his first. He repeats the proclamation of a universal doom. But the time is perhaps later. Judah has disregarded the many threats. She will not accept the Lord's discipline; and while in chap. i.–ii. 3 Zephaniah had said that the meek and righteous might escape the doom, he now emphatically affirms that all proud and impenitent men shall be removed from Jerusalem, and a humble people be left to her, righteous and secure. There is the same moral earnestness as before, the same absence of all other elements of prophecy than the ethical. The injustice, oppression, corruption, and profanity rampant in Jerusalem are all due to the fact that men have ceased to believe in the pure, just, and righteous Jehovah. Her rulers, the prophet declares, are fierce as lions; her judges like ravening wolves that spare not a bone for the morrow. Her professional prophets are utterly false, and her priests are profane and irreligious. Yet a righteous and pure God reigns in her midst. The light of His judgments, revealed afresh every morning, should shame the unjust, were they not shameless. What warning had she learned from the great past? Had not Jehovah again and again revealed His power in the overthrow of nations, the destruction of their fortresses, and the desolation of their cities? Jehovah Himself, after such manifestations of His sovereignty, could be thought of as looking for reverence and obedience, so that His chosen people might fulfil their Divine destiny, but they were only the more eagerly bent upon evil. "Therefore wait ye upon me, saith the Lord, until the day that I rise up to the prey."

Zephaniah then declares that it is the determination of Jehovah to gather all nations and kingdoms together that He may visit them universally and simultaneously with judgment

under the fire of His sovereign wrath. After such visitation the nations will then with a pure lip call upon the name of the Lord and serve Him with one consent.

There follows on this a beautiful picture of Jerusalem restored to the Divine favour. The evil past is so far forgotten that it will not even call up the flush of shame. The haughty and arrogant are banished, and are seen no more in their boastful pride upon God's holy mountain. Only a chastened, humble people are left, and their living faith in Jehovah shows fruit in their daily life. Sifted and purified, they are truthful and guileless, and dwell in such safety that none can make them afraid.

¶ In eternity, by God's mercy, you will find that even your daily trials . . . are mercies. He would, by them, make you what He would have you. They are so many corrections of pride. Without them you might be sweet, loving, tender; but you would not have meekness brought out. The religious proverb says, "There is no humility without humiliation." Moses, from the fire of his middle age, was made the "meekest man on the earth," by the continued ingratitude and bickerings of those 600,000 whom God sent him to deliver. Almighty God . . . observes you, is ready with His grace to help you if you will, says of you, if you are meek (so to speak), "—— took that meekly for love of Me." This is what He expresses by the things being "written in His book." You are under the Captain of your salvation. His Eye is upon you. One great battle which you have, is to learn meekness. . . . Each [trial] is a chip to mould you to that likeness of Him who says to each of us, "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart."[1]

2. Zephaniah's prophecy was fulfilled. The Day of the Lord came, and the people met their judgment. The Remnant survived —"a folk poor and humble." To them, in the new estate and temper of their life, came a new song from God, and they added it to his prophecies. It came in with wonderful fitness, for it was the song of the redeemed, whom he had foreseen, and it tuned his book, severe and simple, to the full harmony of prophecy, so that his book might take a place in the great choir of Israel—the diapason of that full salvation which no one man, but only the experience of centuries, could achieve. "Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout aloud, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the

[1] *Spiritual Letters of Edward Bouverie Pusey*, 13.

heart, O daughter of Jerusalem. The Lord hath taken away thy judgements, he hath cast out thine enemy; the king of Israel, even the Lord, is in the midst of thee; thou shalt not see evil any more."

The day of judgment is past. The people are safe from their enemies, for Jehovah Himself dwells in their midst. Warfare is over; iniquity is pardoned. In that day, which this psalmist anticipates with glowing soul, there will be only cheerful exhortation to courage and fearlessness. Jehovah the Mighty will protect His people. He will bend over them in a silent ecstasy of love, and anon rejoice with singing. The scattered sons of Israel, longing for the old worship and its feast-days, will have their heart's desire granted. Jehovah will deal with all who afflict, and will gather together the halt, the exiled, and the shamed. They will all be brought back to world-wide honour in the day when Jehovah openly restores His own people to prosperity.

¶ In all the writings of the Exile the reader is confused by a strange mingling of the spiritual and the material, the universal and the local. The moral restoration of the people to pardon and righteousness is identified with their political restoration to Judah and Jerusalem. They have been separated from ritual in order to cultivate a more spiritual religion, but it is to this that a restoration to ritual is promised for a reward. While Jeremiah insists upon the free and immediate communication of every believer with Jehovah, Ezekiel builds a more exclusive priesthood, a more elaborate system of worship. Within our prophecy of Isaiah while one voice deprecates a house for God built with hands, affirming that Jehovah dwells with every one who is of a poor and contrite spirit, other voices dwell fondly on the prospect of the new temple and exult in its material glory. This double line of feeling is not merely due to the presence in Israel of those two opposite tempers of mind, which so naturally appear in every national literature. But a special purpose of God is in it. Dispersed to obtain more spiritual ideas of God and man and the world, Israel must be gathered back again to get these by heart, to enshrine them in literature, and to transmit them to posterity, as they could alone be securely transmitted, in the memories of a nation, in the liturgies and canons of a living Church.[1]

3. Centuries have passed since that wonderful prophecy was uttered and found its no less wonderful fulfilment. But for us its menace of doom and its message of hope have undying signi-

[1] G. A. Smith, *The Book of Isaiah, xl.–lxvi.*, 46.

ficance. The Old Testament would be distinctly the poorer if the perfervid phrases of the man whose soul was on fire for truth and liberty, for righteousness and Jehovah, had been omitted from the sacred volumes of its Canon; if his stern denunciation of idolatry and hypocrisy, of pride and tyranny, if his firm insistence on purity of heart and voice, and if his noble philosophy of Divine punishment did not ring in our ears, provoking us to repent of our evil deeds, to remove them from our hearts, and stimulating us to call upon the name of the Lord, and to serve Him in meekness and with one consent.

The abiding value of the Book of Zephaniah rests mainly upon three foundations: (1) the profoundly earnest moral tone of the prophet, with his deep sense of the sin of injustice and oppression, and inflexible demand for purity of heart and conduct; (2) his doctrine of the disciplinary value of suffering; and (3) the wide outlook of the prophet's philosophy of history, his doctrine of Divine Providence. The apparently irresponsible Scythians come upon the scene at the moment God needs their presence; the various nations are overtaken by the Divine judgment, in order that God's purpose may be accomplished of blessing not only the Jewish people but the whole world.

¶ The idea of a universal monarchy has visited the great minds of our race. They have cherished their various dreams of a time when all men should live under one law and possibly speak one language, and have interests so truly in common that war should be impossible. But an effectual instrument for accomplishing this grand design has ever been wanting. Christ turns this grandest dream of humanity into a rational hope. He appeals to what is universally present in human nature. There is that in Him which every man needs,—a door to the Father; a visible image of the unseen God; a gracious, wise, and holy Friend. He does not appeal exclusively to one generation, to educated or to uneducated, to Orientals, or to Europeans alone, but to man, to that which we have in common with the lowest and the highest, the most primitive and most highly developed of the species. The attractive influence He exerts upon men is not conditioned by their historical insight, by their ability to sift evidence, by this or that which distinguishes man from man, but by their innate consciousness that some higher power than themselves exists, by their ability, if not to recognize goodness when they see it, at least to recognize love when it is spent upon them.[1]

[1] Marcus Dods, *The Gospel of St. John*, ii. 52.

HAGGAI.

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HAGGAI.

Then spake Haggai the Lord's messenger in the Lord's message unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith the Lord.—Hag. i. 13.

Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the Lord; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the Lord, and work: for I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts.—Hag. ii. 4.

THE novelist S. R. Crockett says somewhere regarding one of his characters that he belonged to the great society of encouragers. That select and goodly fellowship has had its members in all ages. It was the appointed task of each of the prophets of Israel to inspire his hearers and his readers with his own ardent hope and dauntless courage. And each of them did this in the same way—by bringing the doubting and the fearing back to faith in a living, a gracious, and a present God. "God is with us"—Immanuel—was the watchword of the greatest pre-Exilic prophet. "Fear not, for I am with thee" was the trumpet note of the greatest prophet of the Exile (Is. xliii. 5). And God's messengers in the difficult and depressing days which immediately followed the Return, when the fallen nation was struggling to its feet again and bracing itself for a fresh start, still emphasized the sublime words of encouragement, "I am with you, saith the Lord."

1. Haggai lived in a time when cheering and emboldening words were almost the one thing needful. The Second Isaiah had depicted Jehovah manifesting His glory to Israel, gathering them from all quarters, making a road for them through the desert, leading them like a shepherd to their home, renewing His covenant with them, pouring His Spirit upon them, beginning for them a time of eternal favour and blessing, and making them a light to the Gentiles, the bearers of His salvation to the ends of the earth. But somehow the reality seemed to come far short of this glowing prophetic hope.

Deutero-Isaiah's prophecy of the freeing of the people under Cyrus had been fulfilled after the conquest of Babylon. The edict of Cyrus granted permission to the exiles to return, and about 50,000, under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua the priest, availed themselves of it. But the condition of things in the home so eagerly longed for did not answer the high-flown expectations of the returned exiles. The foreign domination still continued, and all energy was paralysed by poverty and failure of crops, as well as by the hostility of the Jewish-heathen mixed population, which had gradually spread over the land during the Exile. Even if the cultus was resumed, immediately after the Return, by the re-erection of the altar of burnt-offering (Ezra iii. 2 ff.), it was not till the year 520 that, thanks to the energetic stimulation of Haggai and Zechariah, the work of building the Temple was taken in hand in earnest, and finished in 516.

2. There are, indeed, eminent scholars who maintain that Cyrus failed to fulfil any of the expectations which were cherished regarding him.

¶ It has been commonly supposed that the hope of the "Deutero-Isaiah" was realized almost literally. It must however be confessed, that, whereas there is but little confirmation of this supposition, there are many weighty reasons that may be urged against it. The actual statement that Cyrus authorized the Jews to return seems to belong to the work of the Chronicler, and not to be taken from an older source. Nor is there any confirmation of it apart from the Bible. The cylinder-inscription of Cyrus apparently refers to Assyria and Babylonia rather than to all the captive population of the whole Babylonian Empire. On the other hand the whole evidence of the Books of Haggai and Zechariah is strongly opposed to the supposition of any such return. Neither of these prophets gives the slightest hint that there has been an extraordinary change in the fortunes of Israel only some seventeen years previously; Zechariah indeed explicitly says that Jehovah has been wroth with the cities of Judah *for seventy years*; both prophets use language which is only explicable if they regard Persia as *still* the oppressor; and both look forward to the shaking of the nations by which alone the real welfare of Israel can be secured.[1]

[1] R. H. Kennett, in *Cambridge Biblical Essays*, 109.

3. In any case the nature of Haggai's mission was clear. He was called to continue the task of strengthening the weak hands and confirming the feeble knees, of saying to those who were of a fearful heart, "Be strong, fear not." He was sent to communicate to Israel his own indomitable faith and unquenchable hope.

¶ One of Charles Reade's characters, the inimitable Frenchman Denys in *The Cloister and the Hearth*, used to face every difficulty and danger with the cheerful words on his lips, "Courage, camerade, le diable est mort." The prophets of Israel did not say that; in truth, not one of them ever mentions the devil at all. But each of them did say, "Courage, for the Lord liveth, and He is with you." "Best of all," as John Wesley used to say, "God is with us." One of Jesus' favourite words is θαρσεῖ or θαρσεῖτε, which is translated "Be of good cheer," and the best single English equivalent of His Divine word is just "Courage!" "In the world," He said, "ye shall have tribulation, but courage, I have overcome the world." He is the President of the great society of encouragers.

I.

The New Temple.

1. Haggai knew the people had no right to encourage themselves in the Lord their God, as young David did (1 Sam. xxx. 6), unless they were at the same time doing something for His glory. Those who expect great things from Him must attempt great things for Him. The most courageous and sanguine men in the world are the fellow-workers of God, who come to His help against the mighty, espousing His cause, fighting His battles, maintaining His honour. And like every other true prophet, Haggai addresses himself to the urgent need of the present hour. His eyes are not in the ends of the earth or in the far-off unknown future. He sees his own and his nation's immediate duty as clear as noonday. He has learned the great lesson, to act in the living present, "heart within and God o'erhead." He knows, of course, that when God's Kingdom comes it will be in His own time and way. But he also knows that He uses the energies of men and makes them an integral part of His own mighty plan.

God's all, man's nought:
But also, God, whose pleasure brought
Man into being, stands away
As it were a handbreadth off, to give
Room for the newly-made to live,
And look at Him from a place apart,
And use his gifts of brain and heart,
Given, indeed, but to keep for ever.[1]

2. Haggai sees that God had given the people of his day gifts of brain and heart for the plain task of building in the Holy City a new temple for His worship. He rebukes their lack of public spirit and devotional feeling. While they build for themselves cieled houses, while every man runs to his own house, they can look without shame and without pain upon God's house still lying waste. And he assures them that it is for their disregard of the urgent necessity of the hour that the heaven is withholding its dew and the earth its fruit.

¶ For ourselves Haggai's appeal to the barren seasons and poverty of the people as proof of God's anger with their selfishness must raise questions. But we have already seen, not only that natural calamities were by the ancient world interpreted as the penal instruments of the Deity, but that all through history they have had a wonderful influence on the spirits of men, forcing them to search their own hearts and to believe that Providence is conducted for other ends than those of our physical prosperity. Haggai, therefore, takes no sordid view of Providence when he interprets the seasons, from which his countrymen had suffered, as God's anger upon their selfishness and delay in building His House.[2]

3. It is sometimes levied as a reproach against Haggai that he makes no direct reference to moral duties, and it is doubtless true that his treatment of his theme, practical and effective as it was for the purpose in hand, moves on a far lower level than the aspirations of the prophet who wrote the closing chapters of Isaiah. To the latter the material Temple is no more than a detail in the picture of a work of restoration eminently ideal and spiritual, and he expressly warns his hearers against attaching

[1] R. Browning, *Christmas Eve.*
[2] G. A. Smith, *The Book of the Twelve Prophets*, ii. 239.

intrinsic importance to it. To Haggai the Temple appears so essential that he teaches that, while it lay waste, the people and all their works and offerings were unclean. In this he betrays his affinity with Ezekiel, who taught that it is by the possession of the sanctuary that Israel is sanctified.

The time is still far distant when a Greater than any of the prophets taught that a material fabric is not necessary for the service of God, who as a Spirit is worshipped in spirit and in truth. The greatest of the prophets—Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah—might well have understood such a reasonable service—a worship of God without altar and sacrifice—and directed their efforts to making it a reality in Israel. But Haggai's inspiration moved him in a different direction, and impartial historians contend that he took the only right, because the only possible, course, due regard being had to the circumstances of his time.

¶ In point of fact the practical issue of the prophetic reformation sketched in Deuteronomy had been to make the Temple the national centre still more than formerly. The hagiocracy towards which Ezekiel had already opened the way was simply inevitable.[1]

II.

The Forward View.

1. The books of history and memory should not only record the events of the past, but also guide and inspire their readers to face the problems of the future. Unless this or that story is told in the proper spirit and interpreted by a heroic faith, it may have a depressing and paralysing effect. Dante has said that "there is no greater sorrow than to be mindful of the happy time in misery" (*Inferno*, v. 121 f.), and Chaucer:

> For, of fortunes sharp adversitee,
> The worst kinde of infortune is this,
> A man to han ben in prosperitee
> And it remembren, when it passed is.

Haggai makes it evident that he was surrounded by garrulous old men who lived in the past, and whose reminiscences were damping

[1] Wellhausen, *History of Israel*, 494.

the ardour and relaxing the moral fibre of the man of the new time. "Who is left among you," he asks, "that saw this house in its former glory? How do you see it now? Is it not in your eyes as nothing?" From these questions we may perhaps infer with Ewald that Haggai was one of those who had seen the Temple "in its former glory," and that his prophetic work began in extreme old age. This supposition agrees well with the shortness of the period covered by his book, and with the fact that Zechariah, who began to prophesy in the same autumn, afterwards appears as the leading prophet in Jerusalem.

2. If that was so, Haggai was a sanguine as well as an eloquent old man. His memory carried him back to the time when, as a child, he had seen the splendid Temple of Solomon in all its glory. But he chants no pathetic dirge about "a sorrow's crown of sorrow." On the contrary, he has the rapture of the forward view. He knows that the best is yet to be. The things that are behind merely suggest to him the greater things that are before. Let the dead past bury its dead. Let the mind cease from brooding, and give itself to hoping and aspiring. How the old man rings the changes upon his one essential theme, which he knows to be God's message: "Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the Lord; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the Lord, and work: for I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts."

3. Thus the optimist of Jerusalem confronted the pessimists of his time. His was not the shallow, light-hearted optimism which forgets or ignores the deep miseries of the world. It was the optimism which is "very sure of God," seeing His hand in the past and the present, trusting Him for the future, and "greeting the unseen with a cheer." He was not a *laudator temporis acti*, but a herald of the dawn. A desponding or despairing servant of God is a contradiction in terms. A Christian must logically be optimistic about the future—a teleological view of the universe implies optimism on the whole.

¶ It is the element of duty in it that saves optimism from being one of the worst of things and makes it one of the best. There is a cheap and impertinent optimism, which consists in not looking at the facts of life, but nursing a pleasant mood without

reference to them. From this Stevenson was singularly free. He prayed to be delivered from all cheap pleasures, and refused to cheat himself into any blindfold light-heartedness. He found some good things actually there, and concentrated on them—a very different matter from the brainless optimism of the blindfolded. His action when no good could be seen, was founded upon a faith that in the depths

> This world's no blot for us,
> Nor blank; it means intensely and means good,

—a faith which he found experience abundantly to confirm. It is one thing to live in a fool's paradise of our own imagining; it is a very different thing to trust life and to find it reveal its trustworthiness in return for the venture of faith. Whether optimism shall be mere vanity, or whether it shall be the discovery of God, depends almost wholly upon how much it is cherished on the one hand as a form of selfishness, or on the other as a matter of duty. He believed in life because he found that only in that belief could a man be true to himself and serviceable to others. And life justified his faith, for to the strenuous and the unselfish it is always true that "experience worketh hope, and hope maketh not ashamed."[1]

III.

The Messianic Age.

1. When the prophets observed the quickening of the currents of providence in any direction, whether of judgment or of salvation, the presentiment filled their minds that it was the beginning of the Day of the Lord. They had a finer sensibility than others to detect the currents of things. Their hearts were full of certain issues, and they were constantly looking for them, although the exact time of their coming was hid from them. And as one in the darkness thinks he hears the approach of an evil which he dreads, these prophets, when the sound of Jehovah's goings was more distinctly heard than usual, deemed that what they heard was the warning of His coming to shake terribly the earth. This was not a mere subjective feeling. For His final appearance was closely connected with these manifestations in great providences,

[1] J. Kelman, *The Faith of Robert Louis Stevenson*, 254.

as the outermost ring in the pool is but the widening of the innermost. To say that this frame of things shall never reach a goal is to put God out of it as effectually as to say that it never began. But it shall not end in a manner which cannot be guessed at. It shall end on the lines on which it is at present moving. And the ear that is wakened by Jehovah, and sharpened by His touch, may detect in the sounds of any signal providence the final issue of things, as surely as one can hear the full tempest in the first drops that fall sharp and measured upon the leaves in the sultry stillness of the air.

2. The monuments of Babylon have thrown much light upon the prophecies of Haggai, making it clear what were the events which seemed to him like the shaking of a nation. In 521 B.C. a pretender Nidintu Bel, who had assumed the name of Nebuchadnezzar, laid claim to the throne of Babylon, and about the same time revolts broke out in Persia, Susiana, Media. The appointment of Zerubbabel may therefore have been a sop to the Jews in Babylonia and in Palestine to prevent the disaffection spreading to them. If, however, this was the intention of Darius, it was at best only partially successful. The Palestinian section of the Jews, at any rate, looked for nothing less than full political freedom.

It is possible that Haggai anticipated from these revolts the downfall of the Persian Empire. Zechariah, writing some six months later, is less sanguine, though he too looks for the overthrow of the government.

3. These were the events which suggested to the two sanguine prophets in Jerusalem, and to all who shared their ideals, the immediate coming of the Kingdom of God. To the Jews it seemed that Persia was tottering, and that the Messianic era was nigh. It was therefore natural that Haggai and Zechariah should urge the speedy building of the Temple, in order that the great King might be fittingly received. After the shaking of the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land, after the shaking of all nations, the desirable things of all nations shall come, and the Lord of Hosts shall fill with His glory the house which the Jews had begun to rear unto Him.

The meaning of the words "the desirable things" is clearly indicated in the verse which follows. "The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts." The Kingdom of God having been established and the Temple having become the religious centre of the earth, the Gentiles will send their choicest treasures for the adornment of the house which is destined to be a house of prayer for all nations. This tribute of the nations is the outward expression of their recognition of Jehovah, and accordingly the passage may rightly be regarded as having a Messianic reference, though it cannot be understood as a prophecy of the Messiah Himself. Construction and sense are both illustrated by Is. lx. 5, to which this passage may very possibly be an allusion: "The abundance of the sea shall be turned unto thee, the wealth of the nations shall come unto thee."

¶ The beautiful translation in the A.V., "the Desire of all nations shall come," was due to the Vulgate—*veniet desideratus cunctis gentibus*—and suggested the great and true idea that the nations are "feeling after him if haply they may find him." This is not grammatically permissible, but the new and accurate rendering contains an equally magnificent promise. The prophets sometimes expressed deeper things than they knew, and the "desirable things" which all nations are to bring into the Kingdom of God are not to be limited to their material offerings, but include whatsoever things are true, and honourable, and just, and pure, and lovely, and of good report. The British nation has expressed its faith in God the Father by inscribing on the portal of its Royal Exchange the words, "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof"; and the time will come when every nation of the earth will say to God the Son not only "Take my silver and my gold," but—

> Take my love; my Lord, I pour
> At Thy feet its treasure-store.
>
> Take myself, and I will be
> Ever, only, all for Thee.

¶ Have we, indeed, desired the Desire of all nations? and will the Master whom we meant to seek, and the Messenger in whom we thought we delighted, confirm, when He comes to His temple, —or not find in its midst,—the tables heavy with gold for bread, and the seats that are bought with the price of the dove? Or is our own land also to be left by its angered Spirit;—left among

those, where sunshine vainly sweet, and passionate folly of storm, waste themselves in the silent places of knowledge that has passed away, and of tongues that have ceased? This only we may discern assuredly: this, every true light of science, every mercifully granted power, every wisely-restricted thought, teach us more clearly day by day, that in the heavens above, and the earth beneath, there is one continual and omnipotent presence of help, and of peace, for all men who know that they Live, and remember that they Die.[1]

[1] Ruskin, *The Queen of the Air*, § 100 (*Works*, xix. 387).

ZECHARIAH.

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ZECHARIAH.

And the Lord answered the angel that talked with me with good words, even comfortable words.—Zech. i. 13.

For who hath despised the day of small things?—Zech. iv. 10.

i. The Hour and the Man.

1. ZECHARIAH was the younger contemporary of Haggai, and his prophecies have the same background—Jerusalem in her desolation at the beginning of the reign of Darius, king of Persia (521–488). The time is described in a phrase which was doubtless often on men's lips—"the day of small things." At such a time, when the nation's very existence depended upon its loyalty to its spiritual ideals, the greatest of all services which a prophet could render was to rekindle faith and reanimate hope in the minds of his compatriots. It was for him to prove that, however many were the causes of despondency, they were yet far outnumbered by the grounds of confidence.

In this period prophecy does not maintain that lofty position which it has hitherto held in the life of Israel, and the reasons for its decline are obvious. To begin with, the national life, from which it springs, is of a far poorer quality. Israel is no longer a kingdom, but a colony. The State is not independent: there is virtually no State. The community is poor and feeble, cut off from all the habit and prestige of its past, and beginning the rudiments of life again in hard struggle with nature and hostile tribes. To this level prophecy has to descend, and occupy itself with these rudiments. We miss the civic atmosphere, the great spaces of public life, the large ethical issues. Instead we have tearful questions, raised by a grudging soil and bad seasons, with all the petty selfishness of hunger-bitten peasants. The religious duties of the colony are mainly ecclesiastical: the building of a Temple, the arrangement of ritual, and the ceremonial discipline of the people in separation from their heathen neighbours.

But what a mistake it is to despise the day of small things if there is working in and through them all the power of Nature or all the grace of God! As we read the utterances of Zechariah, we are involuntarily reminded of the matchless words, "For, lo, winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come." We feel the breath of spring, we catch the spirit of hope, we have a sure presentiment that miracles are going to happen. Seeds and germs are small things, but the mystery of life is in them, with the promise and potency of immeasurable harvests. Prostrate Jerusalem is despised by a cruel and mocking world, and, what is worse, she can scarcely help despising herself. Guardian though she be of the light which is to lighten the world, her lot seems so bitter that she is prone to despair. But in her hour of sorest need God sends her prophets whose words of inspiration are one continuous *sursum corda*. It is her salvation that she gives good heed to them. At such a time God would forgive her aught save her despair.

¶ Lord Radstock loved in later years to recall these events—so small in themselves as to be passed over almost unnoticed. One of the keynotes of his life and work was his deep recognition of the smallest events as indications of providential leading. The fruitfulness of those tiny seeds of opportunity which most of us ignore was a marked feature of his life, and the constant watchfulness resulting from his continual waiting upon God in the minutest details for direction and guidance, differentiated his spiritual life, to a large extent, from others. To quote his own words: "The tsetse fly in South Africa has been one of the most potent factors in the social, commercial and military affairs of that Continent. Was the first tsetse an unimportant personage? Perhaps there is no deeper saying of St. Augustine than 'Maximus in Minimis,' yet how often we say, 'Oh, that's only a little thing, it doesn't matter, does God look into such trifles?' Scientific thought to-day is largely occupied with the study of organisms so minute as to escape detection by the most powerful microscope. Yet these organisms, infinitesimal as they are, have power to affect the lives and destinies of men. If that be so in the natural order, how much more in that spiritual realm of the Unseen where God has 'chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are'?"[1]

[1] Mrs. E. Trotter, *Lord Radstock* (1914), 181.

¶ Mr. Lloyd George spoke on the War at Bangor, Feb. 28, 1915. Concluding his speech in Welsh, he said:—War is a time of sacrifice and of service. Some can render one service, some another, some here and some there. Some can render great assistance, others but little. There is not one who cannot help in some measure, whether it be only by enduring cheerfully his share of the discomfort. In the old Welsh legend there is a story of a man who was given a series of what appeared to be impossible tasks to perform ere he could reach the desires of his heart. Among other things he had to do was to recover every grain of seed that had been sown in a large field, and bring it all in, without one missing, by sunset. He came to an anthill and won all the hearts and enlisted the sympathies of the industrious little people. They spread over the field, and before sundown the seed was all in except one, and as the sun was setting over the western skies a lame ant hobbled along with that grain also. Some of us have youth and vigour and suppleness of limb; some of us are crippled with years or infirmities and we are at best but little ants. But we can all limp along with some share of our country's burden, and thus help her in this terrible hour to win the desire of her heart.[1]

2. As only eight chapters of the Book of Zechariah bear the prophet's name, and the last six (ix.–xiv.) reflect the conditions of a much later time, we confine our attention to the former. Zechariah's prophecies are of almost unique interest. In the form of a vision, or rather dream, we have a series of word-painted political or ecclesiastical cartoons, from which it is not difficult to obtain a fairly clear idea of the influences at work in Judah during the months which followed the beginning of the restoration of the Temple.

Two things in these prophecies specially attract us—the ethical spirit which pervades them and the winsomeness of the personality which expresses itself in them. Zechariah affirms again that the whole essence of God's Word by the older prophets has been moral—to judge true judgment, to practise mercy, to defend the widow and orphan, the stranger and poor, and to think no evil of one another. For the sad fasts of the Exile Zechariah enjoins gladness, with the duty of truth and the hope of peace. Again and again he enforces sincerity and love without dissimulation.

[1] *The Times*, March 1, 1915.

His ideals for Jerusalem are very high, including the conversion of the nations to her God. But warlike ambitions have vanished from them, and his pictures of her future condition are homely and practical. Jerusalem shall be no more a fortress, but spread village-wise without walls—full families, unlike the present colony with its few children and its men worn out in middle life, by harassing warfare with enemies and a sullen nature; streets rife with children playing and old folk sitting in the sun; the return of the exiles; happy harvests and springtimes of peace; solid gain of labour for every man, with no raiding neighbours to harass, nor the mutual envies of peasants in their selfish struggle with famine.

And we feel that all through we are in spiritual communion with one of the most lovable of the prophets. It is a simple, hearty but practical man whom such prophesying reveals, the spirit of him bent on justice and love, and yearning for the unharassed labour of the field and for happy homes. No prophet has more beautiful sympathies, a more direct word of righteousness, or a braver heart.

¶ In cultured circles it requires some courage, not so much to admit that one belongs to the Christian brotherhood, as to carry out its idea calmly and unobtrusively, in the midst of alien or antagonistic influences; and one of the chief difficulties in our complex modern life is how to unite catholicity of spirit with religious earnestness. It has always been found extremely difficult to combine the recognition of good in others with energetic protest against evil of all kinds.

It is the duty of the Christian brotherhood to seek out the latent good: and if possible to evoke it, in all quarters, and in every character. At the same time, it is bound to bring forward, and to exhibit, the noblest possible standard of action, while it recoils from baseness of every kind, and draws the line—sharp, distinct and clear—between the two camps of light and darkness, the right and the wrong, the good and the evil. It is not easy to combine these two things.[1]

3. Two important features of these prophecies require to be noted: the number of visions which they contain, and their frequent references to the activity of angels.

(1) The vision was not by any means a new method of convey-

[1] W. Knight, *The Christian Ethic.*

ing religious instruction. Amos, the oldest of the writing prophets, employs it; and there was not a time in the history of the chosen people when it was not more or less popular. Thus the word "vision" actually became a synonym for prophecy. This method of presentation—for it finally became a purely literary device—is found in its most complete development in the Book of Ezekiel. It was not from Ezekiel, however, that Zechariah learned to use visions, but from Amos. This is clear from the way in which he uses them, namely, in groups, and for the purpose, not of stimulating in his people great expectations for the future, but of impressing upon them the lessons of the past and the urgent demands of the present. Therefore, much as he taught by visions, it would be a mistake and an injustice to call him a visionary. In fact, there is none of the later prophets that is more sane and practical.

¶ In the *Descriptive Catalogue* to his exhibition of pictures in 1809, Blake defines, more precisely than in any other place, what vision was to him. He is speaking of his pictures, but it is a plea for the raising of painting to the same "sphere of invention and visionary conception" as that which poetry and music inhabit. "The Prophets," he says, "describe what they saw in vision as real and existing men, whom they saw with their imaginative and immortal organs; the Apostles the same; the clearer the organ, the more distinct the object. A spirit and a vision are not, as the modern philosophy supposes, a cloudy vapour, or a nothing. They are organised and minutely articulated beyond all that the mortal and perishing nature can produce. He who does not imagine in stronger and better lineaments and in stronger and better light than his perishing and mortal eye can see, does not imagine at all. The painter of this work asserts that all his imaginations appear to him infinitely more perfect and more minutely organised than anything seen by his mortal eye." "Inspiration and vision," he says in one of the marginal notes to Reynolds's *Discourses*, "was then, and now is, and I hope will always remain, my element, my eternal dwelling-place." And "God forbid," he says also, "that Truth should be confined to mathematical demonstration. He who does not know Truth at sight is not worthy of her notice."[1]

(2) The other striking feature of the prophecies is the constant mediation of angels. The prophets before the Exile had so sure a sense of God's personal intervention in the affairs of His people that they had no need to think of the ministry of angelic

[1] Arthur Symons, *William Blake*, 13.

beings, although this no doubt formed a part of the popular belief. But with the growing sense of God's transcendence, belief in His self-manifestation became more difficult, and in the post-Exilic literature we are conscious of a change in the prophetic forms of utterance. God now communicates Himself more frequently by than without the agency of angels.

While Zechariah calls these beings *Men*, he also gives them the ancient name, which Ezekiel had not used, of Male'akim, "messengers," "angels." The Instructor "is the Angel who talked with me." In the first vision, the man riding the brown horse, "the man that stood among the myrtle trees," is "the angel of Jehovah that stood among the myrtle trees." The Interpreter is also called "the angel of Jehovah," and if our text of the first vision is correct, the two of them are curiously mingled, as if both were functions of the same Word of God, and in personality not to be distinguished from each other. The Reporting Angel among the myrtles takes up the duty of the Interpreting Angel and explains the vision to the prophet. In the fourth vision this dissolving view is carried further, and the Angel of Jehovah is interchangeable with Jehovah Himself; just as in the vision of Ezekiel the Divine Voice from the Glory and the Man standing beside the prophet are curiously mingled. Again in the fourth vision we hear of those who stand in the presence of Jehovah, and in the eighth of executant angels coming out from His presence with commissions upon the whole earth.

¶ The acknowledgment of angels is needful in the church. Therefore godly preachers should teach them logically. First, they should show what angels are, namely, spiritual creatures without bodies. Secondly, what manner of spirits they are, namely, good spirits and not evil; and here evil spirits must also be spoken of, not created evil by God, but made so by their rebellion against God, and their consequent fall; this hatred began in Paradise, and will continue and remain against Christ and his church to the world's end. Thirdly, they must speak touching their function, which, as the epistle to the Hebrews (chap. i. v. 14) shows, is to present a mirror of humility to godly Christians, in that such pure and perfect creatures as the angels do minister unto us, poor and wretched people in household and temporal policy, and in religion. They are our true and trusty servants, performing offices and works that one poor miserable

mendicant would be ashamed to do for another. In this sort ought we to teach with care, method, and attention, touching the sweet and loving angels. Whoso speaks of them not in the order prescribed by logic, may speak of many irrelevant things, but little or nothing to edification.[1]

ii. Good Words.

Zechariah's visions are not the products of dream or trance states, but literary forms into which he throws his spiritual beliefs and ideals. His vision of angelic riders upon red, sorrel, and white horses, riders who breathe their steeds among the myrtle trees of a glen beside Jerusalem—probably the valley of the Kidron—and bring tidings that all the world is at rest, not only quicken the imagination of the prophet's hearers, but provoke the question which so often rose to the lips of suffering Judah—"How long?" How long will Jehovah give the blessings of rest and peace to all the heathen, and deny them to His own people? It is to hearers in this questioning, desponding frame of mind, who have brooded often on the mysteries of God's providence and long deferred mercy, that the prophet's answering words are addressed—good words, comfortable words. God loves Jerusalem: He is jealous over Zion, He has already returned to His holy city in mercy, and her borders will yet overflow with prosperity. "The Lord shall yet comfort Zion, and shall yet choose Jerusalem."

¶ In the homes of the Scottish poor a little child is taught to say his "good words" to God, and the effect on the development of his mind and character is incalculable. Still more incalculable is the power of the "good words" which God speaks to all His children. Breaking the silence of eternity, speaking at sundry times and in divers manners through His prophets, He has revealed the laws of heaven in the language of earth. And when a Greater than any of the prophets came among men, they wondered at the words of grace which proceeded out of His mouth. In all Divine voices, received and believed, there is a miracle-working power, for they are spirit and they are life.[2]

iii. A City without a Wall.

1. In the rebuilding of Jerusalem were the realists or the idealists to have the victory? The realists felt that it would be

[1] *The Table-Talk of Martin Luther* (ed. 1875), 245. [2] James Strahan.

vain to build houses for themselves or to crown Mount Zion with a second Temple, if they did not at the same time raise a defence of strong walls and battlements. But Zechariah could not see eye to eye with them. To his heart the Lord whispered that He would be to Jerusalem a wall of fire round about, and the glory in the midst of her. To reassure the citizens of Jerusalem the prophet coined an exquisite metaphor: "He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye." And through him a reconciled God seemed to say to the holy city, "Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion: for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee."

But when Nehemiah arrived from Babylon in the following century, the first thing that he did was to survey the ruined walls of the city, and to give orders that they should be immediately rebuilt. Was, then, Zechariah or Nehemiah—the idealist or the realist—right? Was it well or not that psalmists of a later time should teach the proud citizens of Jerusalem to say to pilgrims and strangers, "Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks"? Would it have been better if Jerusalem had been inhabited "as villages without walls"?

2. It would have been interesting to trace the fortunes of a city which in those days had been bold enough to rely on a spiritual defence and not on fortifications. Certain it is that the walls of Jerusalem were ultimately her destruction, encouraging, as they did, the Jews to make so obstinate a stand against the Romans that an almost, if not quite, unparalleled slaughter and misery was the result. But though this part of the prediction was suspended through the unbelief and timidity of the Jews, that part which promised an overflowing population was abundantly fulfilled, the whole land being very soon densely filled with people, and Jerusalem being found too small and confined within the walls built round her.

Even in our own time, when international Christianity is still little more than a dream, the victory remains with the realist. But the ideal will never give men rest until it is realized. He who suffered outside a city wall will break down the walls of all cities, for He will implant in the hearts of all men that perfect love which casteth out fear.

¶ In judging wisely the characters of men, one of the first things to be done is to understand their ideals. Try to find out what kind of men or of life; what qualities, what positions seem to them the most desirable. Men do not always fully recognize their own ideals, for education and the conventionalities of Society oblige them to assert a preference for that which may really have no root in their minds. But by a careful examination, it is usually possible to ascertain what persons or qualities or circumstances or gifts exercise a genuine spontaneous, magnetic power over them—whether they really value supremely rank or position, or money, or beauty, or intellect, or superiority of character. If you know the ideal of a man, you have obtained a true key to his nature. The broad lines of his character, the permanent tendencies of his imagination, his essential nobility or meanness, are thus disclosed more effectually than by any other means. A man with high ideals, who admires wisely and nobly, is never wholly base though he may fall into great vices. A man who worships the baser elements is in truth an idolater though he may have never bowed before an image of stone.[1]

iv. Forgiveness.

1. In the next vision Zechariah sees Joshua the high priest, as the representative of Israel, standing before the bar of God, and the Satan, or accusing angel, making out the strongest possible case against him. The Satan is not yet regarded as a fallen angel who tempts man and thwarts the purposes of God. He is little more than the representative of the justice of God as contrasted with His mercy. It is only in the time of the Chronicler that "the Adversary" becomes the proper name "Satan," but even in Zechariah a certain amount of personality and character is ascribed to this servant of God, for if it is his function to bring to light the sins of those who stand before God's judgment seat, he takes a sinister pleasure in blackening men's characters, and thus merits the rebuke of the supreme Judge (iii. 2). And in the very fact that he exaggerates there is comfort for the accused who waits with fear and trembling to hear the Divine verdict. It is the distinction of Zechariah that he is not only a faithful moralist but also a true evangelist. While his ethical sense is pure and strong, he has learned that the Divine holiness is the holiness of abounding love. And his imagination figures the activity of God's compassion to

[1] W. E. H. Lecky, *The Map of Life*, 66.

Israel in two ways. He sees Joshua, Israel's representative, as a brand plucked out of the fire—the hot fire of the Babylonian Exile—scorched but not consumed; and he sees him stripped by angelic hands of his filthy garments and clothed with rich apparel. In other words, he proclaims that Divine grace is at once redemptive and cleansing; that it saves a nation, as it saves an individual, alike from the guilt and the power of sin. He smiles as he thinks of the triumph of Jehovah's love.

The reproof of the Adversary by the Angel of Jehovah signifies the victory of the milder attribute, that is, Jehovah's determination to save His people, because they are His people and their sufferings appeal to His sympathy, by an act of grace in spite of their unworthiness. It is from this standpoint that the vision becomes, on the one hand, a rebuke to the sceptics of Zechariah's day, and, on the other, a solace for those who, much as they had suffered and were suffering, as they felt, under the Divine displeasure, had retained their faith in Jehovah and still cherished an ardent hope that He would speedily forgive their iniquities and rescue them from destruction.

2. This great-hearted prophet has a clear sense of the redeeming and healing process which is the essence of Christianity. He would fain see a restored nation, as it stands before its God, swept by the same feelings as afterwards surged through the soul of a poor sinner who came into the presence of Christ.

> She sat and wept beside His feet. The weight
> Of sin oppressed her heart; for all the blame
> And the poor malice of the worldly shame,
> To her was past, extinct and out of date;—
> Only the *sin* remained—the leprous state.
> She would be melted by the heat of love,
> By fires far fiercer than are blown to prove
> And purge the silver ore adulterate.
> She sat and wept, and with her untressed hair
> She wiped the feet she was so blest to touch;
> And He wiped off the soiling of despair
> From her sweet soul—because she loved so much.
> I am a sinner, full of doubts and fears:
> Make me a humble thing of love and tears.[1]

[1] Hartley Coleridge.

v. The Messianic Hope.

1. Zechariah's hope for the restored community centred in a prince and a priest—in Zerubbabel the grandson of Jehoiachin, and in Joshua, probably the first historical bearer of the name of high priest. These are the two olive trees, the two sons of oil, that feed the seven lamps of the golden candelabrum.

¶ The phrase "sons of oil" would naturally mean producers of oil; but a Hebrew could use it of any thing or person with which or whom oil was associated in his mind. In this case it refers to persons consecrated, as kings and priests were among the Hebrews, to the execution of high functions by being anointed with oil. The interpreter does not tell Zechariah who these two "anointed ones" are, but the prophet had no difficulty in identifying them. Nor has the modern reader. The fact that there are two immediately suggests the names of Zerubbabel, the hereditary prince, and Joshua, the hereditary high priest, both of whom had been, or were to be, anointed for their offices. The descriptive clause, also, fits them, for in iii. 7, it will be remembered, Joshua was promised access to the immediate presence of Yahweh, and certainly Zechariah did not regard Zerubbabel as any less worthy of the Divine favour. The olive trees, then, symbolize the associated leaders, and their position on either side of the lamp with its seven lights means that they enjoy special favour, protection and assistance of Yahweh, to whom is here ascribed omnipotence as well as omniscience. The effect of such teaching can easily be imagined. It must have greatly encouraged the leaders themselves and greatly increased their influence with their followers, thus doubly affecting the enterprise then in progress, the restoration of the national sanctuary.[1]

2. A second Messianic passage (vi. 9–15) represents the crowning of the king of Israel. According to the Massoretic text, Zechariah is commissioned to make a crown out of the silver and gold brought by emissaries of the Babylonian Jews, and set it upon the head of Joshua the high priest. But it seems practically certain that the original prophecy in ver. 11 has been subsequently modified, doubtless because it was not fulfilled. The last clause of ver. 13—"the counsel of peace shall be between them *both*"—shows that two persons have just been mentioned. The preceding clause must therefore be translated, not as in A.V. and R.V., "and *he*

[1] H. G. Mitchell.

shall be a priest upon his throne," as if the office of king and priest were to be combined in a single person, but "and *there* shall be (or, as Wellhausen suggests, "and *Joshua* shall be") a priest upon his throne" (or no doubt more correctly, with the Septuagint, "a priest *at his right hand*"). As two persons are involved, and the word "crowns" in ver. 11 is in the plural, it has been supposed that the verse originally read, "set the crowns *upon the head of Zerubbabel and* upon the head of Joshua." On the other hand, in ver. 14 the word "crown" must be read in the singular, and should probably be so read also in ver. 11 (though even the plural could refer to one crown). In that case, if there be but one crown, who wears it? Undoubtedly Zerubbabel: he is the Branch (iii. 8) and the Branch is the Davidic king (Jer. xxiii. 5, xxxiii. 15). The building of the Temple here assigned to the Branch (vi. 12) is elsewhere expressly assigned to Zerubbabel (iv. 9). It is, therefore, he who is crowned: in other words, ver. 11 may have originally read, "set it *upon the head of Zerubbabel.*" Whether we accept this solution or the other, it seems certain that the original prophecy contemplated the crowning of Zerubbabel. As the hopes that centred in Zerubbabel were never fulfilled, the passage was subsequently modified to its present form.

3. The latter end of Zerubbabel, the Davidic prince of whom such high hopes were entertained, is wrapt in obscurity. It was undoubtedly expected that in the restored Judæa he would reign as King, and that Joshua would be a priest at his right hand. But God does not reveal all His counsels even to His prophets. It is significant that from the time of the completion of the Temple, we hear no more of Zerubbabel. Whether he died, or was recalled, it is impossible to say; but inasmuch as he was not succeeded by his son, the latter is perhaps the more likely alternative.

¶ A Jewish tradition relates that Zerubbabel returned to Babylon and died there. It is possible that Darius, after the troubles that broke out during his reign, may have preferred to have a scion of the ancient dynasty of Israel under his eye rather than run the risk of his presence in Judæa stimulating projects for the restoration of the Davidic monarchy. Of

the sons of Zerubbabel (1 Chron. iii. 19 f.) we know absolutely nothing.

In recent years new interest has been given to the personality of Zerubbabel by the extremely able and ingenious work of Sellin, *Serubbabel*. Sellin seeks to make out that, at the instigation of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah (cf. Hag. ii. 23; Zech. iv. 9, viii. 9 ff.), Zerubbabel was actually raised to the throne of Judah, and the Messianic kingdom thus set up, but that he was soon overthrown by the Persians and put to death. The martyr king was even supposed by Sellin to be the suffering Servant of Isaiah liii. The evidence in support of these conclusions is very skilfully marshalled, but one has a feeling that fancy plays too large a part in Sellin's reconstruction of the post-Exilic history, and, so far as the argument rests upon Is. liii. and kindred passages, it will have no weight with those (and their number is increasing) who refuse to see in the Servant an *individual* instead of a *collective* sense.[1]

vi. The Flying Roll and the Ephah.

In two other visions Zechariah figures his intense desire to see the new Judæa delivered not only from the curse but from the presence of iniquity. The colossal roll—so different from one of those little scrolls on which he was in the habit of writing down his prophetic inspirations—a roll twenty cubits long and ten cubits broad, which contains the record of all the crime committed in the community, and which flies like a great bird of prey over the land, entering and destroying the house of every criminal, and the woman called Wickedness who is borne in an ephah far away to the land of Shinar, both represent his passionate longing for a nation free from sin and its inevitable consequences.

The truth which this double vision brings before us is this: that the prosperity of a community, or a happy and thriving social condition, depends not only on outward tokens of God's favour, such as good harvests, freedom from epidemics, successes in war or diplomacy; not only on possessing the best possible form of government and an ecclesiastical condition of which neither radical nor conservative can complain; but also, and mainly, on the sound moral character of the people themselves, on the sense of honour they carry with them into all their dealings, the principle and high tone which characterize their

[1] J. A. Selbie, in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*, iv. 979.

daily life. Church and State may be organized on the best possible principles; Joshua and Zerubbabel may both be assured of God's favour, and yet the social condition of the people may be rotten to the core; and until the members of the community are men of honesty and good faith, there is no kingdom of God upon earth.

¶ England, which has grown so great, may easily become little; through the effeminate selfishness of luxurious living; through neglecting realities at home to amuse herself everywhere else in stalking phantoms; through putting again on her resources a strain like that of the great French war, which brought her people to misery and her Throne to peril; through that denial of equal rights to others, which taught us so severe a lesson at the epoch of the Armed Neutrality. But she will never lose by the modesty in thought and language, which most of all becomes the greatest of mankind; never by forwardness to allow, and to assert, the equal rights of all states and nations; never by refusing to be made the tool of foreign cunning, for ends alien to her principles and feelings; never by keeping her engagements in due relation to her means, or by husbanding those means for the day of need, and for the noble duty of defending, as occasion offers, the cause of public right, and of rational freedom, over the broad expanse of Christendom.[1]

[1] W. E. Gladstone, in *The Nineteenth Century*, iv. (1878) 584.

MALACHI.

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MALACHI.

I have loved you, saith the Lord.—Mal. i. 2.

1. After Haggai and Zechariah, the curtain falls on the fortunes of the Jews for another seventy years. The new energy inspired by these prophets sufficed to carry the building of the Temple on to completion, and it was dedicated with solemn gladness in the sixth year of Darius, 516 B.C. The inevitable reaction must have come; it was soon obvious that the completion of the Temple was not the inauguration of the glories of the Messianic era; the "nations of the earth" remained unshaken; Persia maintained its supremacy; and Judah continued to be a subject-province. In spite of more or less successful revolts, even Egypt for the most part submitted to the authority of the Achæmenidæ. The Jews had to settle down again to the dull round of sordid routine, with such relief and consolation as the more spiritually minded could derive from the Temple services and the study of the national literature.

Then God raised up a man of true prophetic spirit, with keen intuition to discern the plague spots in the nation's life, and with fearless zeal to expose them; and yet withal touched with tender pathos for the nation's woes. This man was in office, perhaps also in name, "the messenger of Jah"—Malachi.

2. The Book of Malachi is an original and attractive one; and we may be thankful that it has been preserved in the volume of the Twelve. Not only does it present us with the picture of a man of deep earnestness and incisive moral force contending boldly and independently against the abuses of his time, but it is, from an historical point of view, of great interest and value; for it sheds much welcome light upon the social and religious condition of Judah at a time about which our other sources leave us in many respects imperfectly informed.

I.

The Name and the Date.

1. Of the author of the last book in the prophetic Canon nothing is known; it is doubtful whether we even know his name. "Malachi" in the original is identical with the word for "my messenger" in chap. iii. 1. If it is a proper name it must be regarded as a contraction of Malachiah, which would mean "Jehovah is messenger." But it is significant that neither the LXX nor the Targum seems to recognize the existence of a prophet called "Malachi." The latter version in chap. i. 1 identifies "my messenger" with Ezra the Scribe—a tradition accepted by St. Jerome. On the whole it seems probable that the title of the book is due to the compiler of the volume of the minor prophets, the name being derived from chap. iii. 1, and understood either as an actual designation of the author, or as a term descriptive of his office as the messenger of God. By the second century A.D., however, "Malachi" had come to be accepted more or less as a proper name.

¶ We call this prophet "Malachi," following the error of an editor of this book, who, finding it nameless, inferred or invented that name from its description of the priest as the "Malĕ'ach," or *messenger, of the Lord of Hosts.* But the prophet gave himself no name. Writing from the midst of a poor and persecuted group of the people, and attacking the authorities both of church and state, he preferred to publish his charge anonymously. His name was in *the Lord's own book of remembrance.*[1]

2. But although the author's name and personality are uncertain, the general period during which he wrote is sufficiently clear. The Exile is a thing of the past. The Jews are living under a Persian prince. The Temple has been rebuilt, and time enough has elapsed for the priests to become slovenly in the performance of their ceremonial, corrupt and partial in their administration of the Law. And it is a case of "like people, like priest." The laity have grown worldly and slack in their devotions. This is seen in the niggardliness of their sacrifices and in their failure to pay the tithes and other Temple dues. It is seen also

[1] G. A. Smith, *The Book of the Twelve Prophets*, ii. 345.

in the increasing practices of divorce and intermarriage with the heathen women of the land and the consequent undermining of family life. Now these are the very abuses against which Ezra and Nehemiah legislated about the middle of the fifth century B.C. There can, therefore, be no reasonable ground for doubting that the prophecy of "Malachi" belongs to that age. The only difficulty is as to whether this book prepared for, supported, or reinforced the reforms which were brought about by Ezra and Nehemiah. Each view has eminent advocates, but it is at present impossible to assign a definite date to this anonymous prophecy. It is enough for us to know that the author was a contemporary of Ezra and Nehemiah, and an independent supporter of their work.

Though the book is undated, it reflects its period almost as clearly as do the dated Books of Haggai and Zechariah. The conquest of Edom by the Nabathæans, which took place during the Exile, is already past. The Jews are under a Persian viceroy. They are in touch with a heathen power which does not tyrannize over them, for this book is the first to predict no judgment upon the heathen, and the first, moreover, to acknowledge that among the heathen the true God is worshipped "from the rising to the setting of the sun." The only judgment predicted is one upon the false and disobedient portion of Israel, whose arrogance and success have cast true Israelites into despair. All this reveals a time when the Jews were favourably treated by their Persian lords. The reign must be that of Artaxerxes Longimanus, 464–424.

II.

The Situation.

1. The situation in Judah at the time when Malachi prophesied was one of depression and discontent. The expectations which earlier prophets had aroused had not been fulfilled. The restoration from Babylon had brought with it none of the ideal glories promised by the Second Isaiah; bad harvests increased the disappointment, hence many among the people began to doubt the Divine justice. Jehovah, they argued, could no longer be the Holy God, for He was heedless of His people's necessity, and per-

mitted sin to continue unpunished; to what purpose, therefore, should they concern themselves with His service? A spirit of religious indifference and moral laxity began thus to prevail among the people. The same temper appeared even among the priests: they performed their offices perfunctorily; they expressed by their actions, if not by their words, their contempt for the service in which they were engaged.

2. One particular fashion in which the people's wounded pride showed itself was the custom of marriage, which even the best families contracted with the half-heathen "people of the land." Across Judah there were scattered the descendants of those Jews whom Nebuchadnezzar had not deemed worth removing to Babylon. Whether regarded from a social or from a religious point of view, their fathers had been the dregs of the old community. Their own religion, cut off as they were from the main body of Israel and scattered among the old heathen shrines of the land, must have deteriorated still further; but in all probability they had secured for themselves the best portions of the vacant soil, and now enjoyed a comfort and a stability of welfare far beyond that which was yet attainable by the majority of the returned exiles. More numerous than these dregs of ancient Jewry were the very mixed race of Samaritans. They possessed a rich land, which they had cultivated long enough for many of their families to be settled in comparative wealth. With all these half-pagan Jews and Samaritans, the families of the true Israel, as they regarded themselves, did not hesitate to form alliances, for in the precarious position of the colony such alliances were the surest way both to wealth and to political influence. How much the Jews were mastered by their desire for them is seen from the fact that, when the relatives of their half-heathen brides made it a condition of the marriages that they should first put away their old wives, they readily did so. Divorce became very frequent, and great suffering was inflicted on the native Jewish women.

3. There had also been a sad scarcity of rain, and this had been followed by famine. The locust, too, was devastating the crops, and the vine dropped its fruit untimely. The ruling

classes were rapacious. The central authority was so weak that the unjust, if bold enough, succeeded, and the yielding were impoverished. The people suffered so severely that many lost faith in God's justice, and said: "It is vain to serve God"; "They that work wickedness are built up." More than this, there was disunion in the home. There were some, probably the sons, who thought the new theocratic *régime* a huge failure. Such were their calamities that they sceptically asked, "What profit is it that we have kept his charge?" The fathers, in many cases, clung tenaciously to Mosaism; but even the saintliest of them thought very seriously about the dark outlook. They often met to strengthen each other's faith, being deeply concerned for the honour of God's name, and distressed at the way in which God's character was lightly spoken of, nay, even profaned.

¶ If Christian people met together and talked to one another as gravely and earnestly about the things for which they were going to ask God, or the matters they intended to lay before Him for His guidance and leadership, as they talk about matters they propose to lay before some political leader, or the programme of some new enterprise which they desire to issue to the world, surely there would be a most amazing extension of our experiences of the power of prayer. It is, of course, a great thing to use the words that have for many generations expressed the outgoing of the heart of humanity; but such well-known words are bound to become empty of their meaning unless, before being used to God at all, they are from time to time considered by the company that is about to utter them. Our common prayer, that is to say, needs time for meditation and deliberation, and opportunity for discussion. It ought to be the final result of high and earnest resolve, deliberately come to by the community, if we want it to have the place and power that the teachings of the Lord and of the writers of the New Testament give to it. What a difference the common confession of sin would have in a group of people who had really opened their hearts to one another, and felt something of the tragedy of individual failure, and also of that other tragedy of the failure of the common Christian life in their midst! And the great thanksgivings, how joyful they would be, and what a vision of the triumphs of the power and goodness of God they would bring with them, if we did but take the simple advice to "count our blessings, and name them one by one" together, before we unitedly turned to God to praise Him![1]

[1] W. Bradfield, *Personality and Fellowship* (1914), 199.

III.

The Message.

In contrast to the three classes of the indifferent, the proud, and the doubters, there was in Judah the seemingly small circle of loyal and pious servants of Jehovah, who clung together, and did their best to reassure one another with thoughts of trust and hope. Malachi, in Jehovah's name, comes forward emphatically as one of these; and his book is essentially an argument addressed to the various classes just mentioned. He points out the inconsistencies and unseemliness involved in the irreverence towards God, and in the practice of divorce; he recalls priests and laity alike to the ideals which they have forgotten; he announces the speedy advent of a great and signal Day of Judgment, which will separate the good from the wicked, and satisfy the doubters, —a day when the degenerate priesthood will be purified, so that Judah's offerings will again, as of old, be acceptable to Jehovah, when the perjurers, the oppressors, and all others who work wickedness will be consumed, and left without "root or branch," but when the little group of His own pious worshippers will be owned by Him as the heirs of Israel's ideal privilege, even as His "peculiar treasure," and when their righteousness, shining forth as the sun, will bring them healing from their woes. Before this Day of Judgment breaks, however, Elijah the prophet will be sent to heal dissensions in the nation, and to do what he can to prepare men for the advent of the Judge.

¶ Is there but one day of judgment? Why, for us every day is a day of judgment—every day is a Dies Iræ, and writes its irrevocable verdict in the flame of its West. Think you that judgment waits till the doors of the grave are opened? It waits at the doors of your houses—it waits at the corners of your streets; we are in the midst of judgment—the insects that we crush are our judges—the moments we fret away our judges—the elements that feed us, judge, as they minister—and the pleasures that deceive us, judge, as they indulge. Let us, for our lives, do the work of Men while we bear the form of them, if indeed those lives are *Not* as a vapour, and do *Not* vanish away.[1]

[1] Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies*, § 134 (*Works*, xviii. 180).

i. God's Love.

1. The first message which Malachi brought to this afflicted, sorrow-stricken people was, *God loves you.* "I love you, saith the Lord." What a startling message! Might they not well say, God loves us? Look at our parched fields, our locust-eaten foliage, our bare vines! Look at our faithless priests and rulers! Look at our wretched homes, where Judæan women have been chased away that wealthy heathen women may take their place! See the discord in our homes—our sons and daughters resenting the rigour of the new *régime*! Had you brought this message some years ago we had accepted it, but not now. "Where is the God of justice?" He has deceived us or forsaken us. To this the prophet could only reiterate the message God had given him: "I love you." "I, Jehovah, change not."

The message of God's unchangeable love must have been sorely needed for the establishment of the prophet's own faith; for was he not commissioned to utter statements which seemed quite to contradict his great initial message? Was he not bidden to say to the priests, "I have no pleasure in you, saith the Lord"; "I will curse your benedictions: yea, I have cursed them already"? And again, addressing the people at large, he says: "Ye are cursed with a curse; for ye rob me, even this whole nation." Nothing short of a revelation which the prophet recognized as Divine could have kept the prophet's faith unswerving in the unchangeable love of God to Israel, when appearances seemed so flatly to contradict it. He was thus taught that the hiding of God's face, the drought, the mildew, the poverty, were God's "strange work"; that calamity is not always punishment, but the discipline of a loving hand; that love inexorably spends itself in making its beloved more lovable that it may love the more. The prodigal children were far from God, poor and desolate, every scheme frustrated, every prospect blighted, every priestly benediction thwarted, and yet the Divine message comes in clear, unmistakable tones: "I love you." "I, Jehovah, change not; therefore ye, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed."

2. Considering what human nature is, it was not unlikely that many in Jerusalem should question God's love. Is it, they might

say, evidence of love that, after being for seventy years in slavery to a cruel people, we should be suffered to return to freedom, only that we might the more keenly feel our own feebleness? Is it evidence of God's love that we have been left all these years exposed to the scorn, violence, and robbery of troops of Samaritans and Ammonites? When our harvests are swept away by armed bands of marauders, when our seed is washed out of the ground by unseasonable rains, or rendered useless by parching droughts, when we have to listen to our children crying for bread, and see their lips blue with famine, are we to find in these things evidence of God's love? Our fathers returned to this land, encouraged to expect the blessing of God in it: where is that blessing?

(1) But Malachi offers proofs. The first proof is one which would appeal more strongly to people of those times than to us who have heard the Sermon on the Mount. He bids the Judæans contrast themselves with the Edomites, their kinsmen, but their most inveterate foes. Bad as their temporal position was, that of Edom, their enemy, was far worse. They had been invaded by the Nabathæan Arabs, probably under Geshem; their homes had been desolated, and a remnant had sought a home in Southern Judah. They hoped shortly to return and rebuild their waste places, but the prophet was caused to see that this was a vain hope. Their cities would remain a perpetual ruin, and themselves the "people against whom the Lord hath indignation for ever."

(2) The other token of the Divine love is the tender way in which the Lord speaks of those who had remained true to the Divine covenant, and were concerned for the honour of God's name: "They shall be mine in the day that I do make, even a peculiar treasure."

Though the word itself is not used, Malachi's theodicy is just Isaiah's doctrine of the preservation of a faithful "remnant," applied and adapted to the circumstances of his own day. Malachi's descriptions of the ideal future are brief. Israel's sacrifices will be acceptable when the priesthood has been purified; prosperity and the envious admiration of the nations are promised if tithe and *terūmāh* are duly paid; the pious worshippers of Jehovah will come forth from their hiding-places into light and happiness when their righteousness has been vindicated and the wicked have been exterminated.

¶ God has His Elect Remnant to-day in those who fear Him and think upon His name. I am not going to attempt, by any word I say, to measure that Remnant, and I rejoice that it has never been revealed to man in any dispensation. It has always been known only and exclusively to the Divine heart, to the Divine love. If you show me a few people who say, "We are the Elect Remnant, we are the Remnant, we are the people who pronounce words in this particular way, or look in that particular direction, we are the people of God's Elect Remnant"—the claim is the sufficient proof of its falseness! Never! God's Elect Remnant in this age is not marked off by any little human boundary of sect or party. God has His faithful souls in the Roman Catholic Church. Let us not blunder about that. I, for one, will not join in all the hateful, indiscriminate outcry against Roman Catholics. The Romish system is one of the most awful the world has ever seen; but in that system are men who were born in it, and are devout in it, and are better than it, who form part of God's Elect Remnant. I have known such. You will find part of them in the great Anglican Church of this country; thank God there are thousands in that Church who must be, by virtue of the saintliness and tenderness and compassion of their lives, God's Elect Remnant. You find them in all sections of the Free Church, and a great number, alas! outside the Church altogether. No one Church can mark off the Remnant of God. Men entitled to that distinction are found everywhere. What are their characteristics? Men who fear Him and who are so conscious of His Kingdom that they live in it; and of His Mastership that they respond to it. Not the men and women who say "Lord, Lord," but they who do the things that God approves. Not the great heterogeneous crowd that bow the head, and say, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done"; but the saintly souls in whose life the Kingdom *is* come, and the will *is* being done.[1]

ii. True Worship.

1. Malachi, like Haggai and Zechariah, is interested chiefly in the Temple and the priesthood, not necessarily from any personal leanings to sacerdotalism, but because the sanctuary and its ministers were the focus of the religious life of his time. The sins denounced are largely ritual abuses—unsatisfactory offerings, imperfect fulfilment of vows, unpaid tithes, contempt for and weariness of public worship. Yet the prophet's attitude is not that

[1] G. Campbell Morgan, *Wherein?* 88.

of a man to whom ritual is an end in itself; he is not distressed about mere lapses in ceremonial etiquette such as the offering of the wrong sort of incense. The faults condemned imply a lack of reverence and devotion to God; and one charge at least, the perversion of the priestly function of interpreting the Divine will, is purely ethical. Moreover, the Temple has become the symbol of the Divine righteousness, the guardian of truth and justice. The sanctuary is profaned by the wrongs done by the Jews to their wives, and its services cease to be efficacious. Like Ezekiel and Zechariah, Malachi holds that the well-being of Israel depends on the presence of Jehovah in His Temple; and the prophet implies that the sins of the people still keep Him aloof. His reverence for the Temple and the priesthood makes him idealize the services and the priests of ancient days, when "the law of truth was in the mouth of Levi, and he walked with God in peace and truth," and "the offering of Judah and Jerusalem was pleasant unto Jehovah"—a view of the ancient priesthood very different from that of Isaiah or Jeremiah, or the Book of Samuel.

2. It must be conceded that Malachi, though a prophet, was in thorough accord with Ezra. He saw the necessity that Israel should be a separate people in the period on which they were now entering, and he believed that the Mosaic ritual was an excellent, if not the only, means of effecting this. Hence he was "zealous for the law." The ethical and the ceremonial were inseparable in his mind. Each formed part of the Divine law, and each must equally be obeyed by those who had entered into covenant with God. Hence disregard for observances of the ceremonial law evokes his censure equally with violations of the moral law. "Equally," we say, but not more so. Malachi was no formalist, to ignore the vital importance of righteous living. He reproves the wickedness of his contemporaries in a truly prophetic spirit, as, for instance, when he declares that God will be "a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers; and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless . . . and fear not me, saith the Lord"; and when he announces that in the Day of the Lord "the proud, and all that work wickedness, shall be as stubble." The attitude of our prophet may be

summed up in his own words, that when the Lord shall purify the sons of Levi "they shall offer unto the Lord offerings *in righteousness.*"

(1) Do we offer our best to God; the best in attention, in time, in thought, in cost? Do we offer the first-fruits of the day to God, or are our sacred and spiritual duties left to take their chance, to be performed when we find it convenient? To make the service of God subservient to our own convenience, to have less zeal for His service than for our own business, or for our own pleasure—this is indeed to offer Him a blemished sacrifice. "And when ye offer the blind for sacrifice, it is no evil! and when ye offer the lame and sick, it is no evil! present it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee? or will he accept thy person? saith the Lord of hosts."

(2) Do we honour God with our substance in tithes and offerings? A tenth of the Jew's income was devoted to the support of religion. It does not follow that any such rule of the tenth is of obligation upon Christian people. But at least it is presented to us as a standard of devotion in giving; and a Christian should have some good reason if his devotion come short of the Jewish rule. The prophet's teaching must in principle be true for Christian as for Jew. Unless we make offering to God according to our means, it is idle to profess a delight in His sanctuary or to pretend a devotion towards Him. "Who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth?"

iii. Social Life.

The charges which Malachi brings against priests and people included some that concerned their moral and social life.

1. Among the prevalent sins of social life there was one on which the prophet lays particular stress. Those who professed a great regard for God's covenant violated the covenant when it pleased them, putting away their wives, not (as the Pharisees of our Lord's time said) "for every cause," but for no cause at all, simply because they had contracted a passion for some strange woman, the daughter of one of the heathen races with whom the children of the covenant were forbidden to intermarry.

The long struggle between the Puritan party and the opportunists in Judaism, which leaves its traces in the diary of Nehemiah, has left permanent monuments in the literature of the nation. The beautiful story of Ruth, long handed down in Bethlehem, may have been written to remind Ezra's party what Israel owed to alien women. This beautiful idyll of rural Israel is preserved because Ruth the Moabitess, wife of Boaz, was an immediate ancestor of David the king. In the light of the brotherhood of nations, many would be tempted to-day to take a severe view of Ezra's religious dogmatism. He would be accused of disregarding the law of nature in order to assert the law of God. But there have been and are many occasions when the interest of the whole religious world has been served by putting a severely construed moral obligation above the law of nature. What Malachi saw was the imminent danger of Israel being absorbed in surrounding nations, and the consequent loss to the world of the unique message and mission which Israel was to bear.

The supreme interest of a nation looking for a Messiah was to have religious homes and dedicated children, trained from the first to be conscious of relationship to God, and willing to render themselves as organs of His will, looking for the fulfilment of the nation's hope, and holding themselves ready for the summons of the Messiah that was to be. All experience goes to show that Malachi was right in maintaining that religious simplicity was necessary to realize the nation's special mission in the world.

¶ With the twentieth century there took place in home life a reaction towards greater freedom and undue independence, a result arising from many causes. In homes now, with all their brightness and love and mutual good fellowship, there are many imperfections and losses as well as gains. The ideal—in some ways not yet realized—has had a long history, but it has been at work from the very beginning, in spite of slow development. One determining element, always existing and never altogether absent, has been the love of home. . . . Home is the true educational starting-place and training centre for character and the social polity on a small scale, wherein, if true Christian principles of justice, truth, self-control, self-sacrifice, purity, and charity prevail, they can be so impressed upon individuals that they will be able to bring them to bear afterwards on a larger and more

public scale. If, as Bishop Creighton said, "Life is the sum of our relationships," the kind of factors in the sum and manner of relationship to them depend upon the home. The family is the type of God's great family in heaven and on earth, and the home the type of the Eternal Home, the perfect fulfilment of all Society. Christianity shows in this, as it does in all else, the light of the truth shining behind the veil of earthly things.[1]

2. Another sin against social order which the prophet denounces, as inconsistent with the pure worship of God, is the sin of oppression. A man is guilty of this sin when he takes an unfair advantage of his superior power or knowledge, to the detriment of his weaker or less skilled brother. Malachi describes these unworthy worshippers as "those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right."

¶ Perhaps in these days the basest oppression is that which consists in the misuse of superior knowledge to take advantage of another's ignorance; as when the seller conceals some fault or flaw in the goods which he wishes to dispose of, or the buyer takes advantage of the ignorance of the seller, to buy for a few pence the object which is worth so many pounds.

It is this base desire to profit by another's ignorance that actuates the terrible system of gambling which is so fatally prevalent in the present day. There may be some excuse for the contest of skill in which the winner is to receive some moderate stake. Some defence may be offered for the wager in which one man backs his judgment against the judgment of another, where all the conditions are known and avowed. But when a man is not exercising judgment or skill, but thinks rightly or wrongly that he has got some private information as to the issue of a coming event, and he bets upon this, no justification can be offered for the action, however small may be the amount of money involved. And this seems to be the character of common betting. A young man has got what he calls a "tip" about some impending race. In most cases, I suppose, no genuine information has been given him. The "tip" itself is a delusion and a fraud. That makes no difference. He thinks he has got some genuine advice, some private information which his brother does not possess. On the strength of this supposed private information, he makes his base wager. He takes advantage of what he thinks his brother's

[1] R. M. Wills, *Personality and Womanhood*, 80.

ignorance; morally his action is the same as if he exchanged tinsel for gold with a fool.[1]

iv. The Judgment.

The Book of Malachi proclaims the need of another judgment as emphatically as the older prophets had predicted the Babylonian doom. "Malachi" repeats their name for it—"the great and terrible day of Jehovah." But he does not foresee it, as they did, in the shape of an historical process. His description of it is pure Apocalypse—"the fire of the smelter and the fuller's acid: the day that burns like a furnace," when all wickedness is as stubble, and all evil men are devoured, but to the righteous "the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings," and they shall tread the wicked under foot.

1. The prophet regards the coming of the Lord as a test of character—a view which is prominent throughout the Fourth Gospel. "This is the judgment," we read (or rather, "the method of judging"), "that light is come into the world; and (some) men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil, . . . but he that doeth the truth cometh to the light." Some will not submit to the scorching light. They love sin. They love darkness. They are condemned already. But all who sincerely seek the Lord are "baptized with fire." They experience keen pangs of remorse and contrition, but are purified as silver, and cleansed as with fullers' soap.

¶ The *wish*, the continued wish, to be contrite, *is* contrition; the wish to hate one's evil self *is* the beginning of such hatred. A person who feels it in the slightest degree, and tries to have more of it, and is grieved not to have more,—such an one, so far, is surely coming to our Lord, and "him that is coming unto Him, He will in no wise cast out." Undoubtedly, the first effort at all this will be very faint and imperfect, but so are all our beginnings, and our *perceiving them to be such* is a good sign, not a bad one.

The only sure and sufficient test of reality in one's feelings, I suppose to be our conduct, *i.e.*, our deliberate thoughts, our words and our actions, and especially in little everyday unnoticed and unnoticeable matters: if we are gradually trying more and more to bring them into captivity to the love of God and our neighbour,

[1] W. A. Whitworth, *The Sanctuary of God*, 88.

we may have the comfortable hope that God accepts our Repentance, however imperfect.[1]

2. Before the advent of "the great and terrible day of the Lord," the appearance is foretold of the "messenger" who shall prepare the way before the Lord. In the New Testament this prediction is repeatedly affirmed to have received its accomplishment in the appearance of John the Baptist. He is identified with the messenger by the angel who appeared to Zacharias, and by our Saviour, after the departure of the messengers of John, as well as by Mark the Evangelist in introducing the historic notice of John. Thus much seems clear; but when we proceed further, and ask whether John the Baptist was also the Elijah of Mal. iv. 5, we meet with very diverse replies. The Jews of Christ's time lived in constant anticipation of a literal reappearance of Elijah who was translated to heaven. Hence they sent to ask John if he was Elijah; and he answered, "I am not"; whereas our Lord is recorded to have said, when speaking of John, "If ye are willing to receive it, this is Elijah, which is to come"; and again, "Elijah is come already, and they knew him not, but did unto him whatsoever they listed." The explanation of this apparent contradiction is that John was not the *literal* Elijah whom the Jews expected, the veritable Elijah who ascended to heaven; but he had come in the spirit and power of Elijah, and if the Jews had "received him," and welcomed the Lord whose herald he was, he would have "restored all things," and Christ would have "gathered" them "as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings." But Israel did not know their Elijah or his Lord, and therefore the restoration was indefinitely postponed, and "the land" of Israel is under "a curse."

¶ We all know the different effect the sun has upon different things. There is a tree planted by the river; the running stream waters its roots, and the summer sunshine, falling upon it, makes it spring to green and beauty; and here is a field of stubble, and the same sun that touches the tree by the river into beauty, burns the stubble with its scorching rays. The same thing brings in the one case life, and in the other barrenness and waste. God's message is, "My day is coming. I shall act." "Behold, the day cometh which will heal and burn." It will heal the souls that

[1] John Keble, *Letters of Spiritual Counsel.*

wait for Him, the wounded souls of the night. It will heal them, why? Because they are planted by the rivers of water, because all their springs are in God, and to them God's Sun comes with beauty, health, and light, and "healing in his wings"; but to those on this side, the men of stubble that are set up to-day, that have no springs outside themselves, that have not found their roots spreading out by the river's edge to the eternal waters, the Sun shall be a scorching heat; they shall be stubble in that day.[1]

v. The Heathen.

The judgment which Malachi looks forward to is confined to Israel; it is a sifting which removes the ungodly members of the theocracy: but the heathen world in general—with the one exception of Edom, which explains itself, and in spite of the prophet's strong condemnation of marriages with foreigners—is viewed by him on its better side, and Israel is contrasted unfavourably with it.

This is perhaps the most original contribution that the Book of Malachi makes to the development of prophecy. In contrast to the irreverence of Israel and the wrong they do to His holiness, Jehovah Himself asserts not only that His Name is great and glorified among the heathen, from the rising to the setting of the sun, but that in every sacred place incense and a pure offering are offered to His Name.

The prophet is obviously contrasting the contempt of God's own people for Himself and His institutions with the reverence paid to His Name among the heathen. It is not the mere question of there being righteous people in every nation, well-pleasing to Jehovah because of their lives. The very sacrifices of the heathen are pure and acceptable to Him. Never have we had in prophecy, even the most far-seeing and evangelical, a statement so generous and so catholic as this.

Why it should appear only now in the history of prophecy is a question we are unable to answer with certainty. Many have seen in it the result of Israel's intercourse with their tolerant and religious masters the Persians. None of the Persian kings had up to this time persecuted the Jews, and numbers of pious and large-minded Israelites must have had opportunity of

[1] G. Campbell Morgan, *Wherein?* 105.

acquaintance with the very pure doctrines of the Persian religion, among which it is said that there was already numbered the recognition of true piety in men of all religions. If St. Paul derived from his Hellenic culture the knowledge which made it possible for him to speak as he did in Athens of the religiousness of the Gentiles, it was just as probable that Jews who had come within the experience of a still purer Aryan faith should utter an even more emphatic acknowledgment that the One True God had those who served Him in spirit and in truth all over the world. But, whatever foreign influences may have ripened such a faith in Israel, we must not forget that its roots were struck deep in the native soil of their religion. From the first they had known their God as a God of a grace so infinite that it was impossible it should be exhausted on themselves. If His righteousness, as Amos showed, was over all the Syrian States, and His pity and His power to convert, as Isaiah showed, covered even the cities of Phœnicia, the great Evangelist of the Exile could declare that He quenched not the smoking wicks of the dim heathen faiths.

¶ In earlier stages of civilization the rivalry and mutual exclusiveness of religions was more frankly a form of *esprit de corps*. It did not cover itself under the pretext of the unity of God, of truth, of righteousness. It was little more than another aspect of the rivalry of clans, tribes and peoples. Israel's God was a God above all gods.

Not till religion passed from its magical stage; not till its regalia were transferred to the worship of spirit and truth and righteousness, was monotheism firmly established on its proper basis. Truth is one, absolute, exclusive. To worship any other God is not merely rebellion and desertion; it is folly, immorality, falsehood. There can be but one religion and one only; all the rest are false. There can be no toleration for falsehood and immorality; exclusiveness is a duty.

The rivalries of monotheistic and spiritual religions are not concerned with *what* we shall worship, but with *how*—whether at Jerusalem or in this mountain. Each stands for certain ideas of truth and goodness; certain conceptions of God and His Will. If these are right, all others must be wrong; for truth is one. Intolerance and exclusiveness are thus deepened. They pass from the surface affections down to the very roots of conscience.

It cannot be otherwise if the truth about God and His Will be ascertainable and as certain as, or more certain than, the truth

about the laws of physical phenomena. What is more exclusive than science? what more intolerant than geometry? And seeing how intimate is the bearing of truth on life and happiness, is not the liberty of disseminating a false religion far more reprehensible than that of vending and advertising deleterious foods or medicines? Hence every religion that believes itself to possess the truth about God and His Will must be exclusive and intolerant. What underlies this intolerance is the conviction that truth is one and that religious truth is supremely important; and, with this, the more doubtful assumption that we possess it and others do not. Given this assumption, tolerance is simply immorality. It has been the assumption of Jew, Moslem and Christian, and is the secret of their exclusiveness.[1]

¶ Passing in thought over the centuries which have elapsed since the close of the Old Testament Canon, we find that the worship of the God of the Jews has undergone certain radical changes. The national exclusiveness of the people of Jehovah has been abolished, and the right of equal access of all men to Him has been recognized and established in its stead. Men of all races and climes and tongues enjoy the same religious privileges. The sacred books of the Jews are jealously guarded as the records of Divine revelation by millions for whom Circumcision, the Passover, and the Ceremonial Law are things of the past, elements of a superseded system.

A Jewish community still remains, but it is insignificant in numbers and powerless to propagate its creed; but it remains a standing witness to the source from which the great and increasing force of Christendom first sprang.

Together with this transformation of the "Commonwealth of Israel" into the Catholic Church, we notice a second equally radical and vital change. The religion of the Catholic Church is essentially spiritual. The keynote of the former dispensation was the separation of man from God, and the impossibility of access save through a system of ritual observance, external sacrifices, and vicarious priesthood. Under the present dispensation the same Lord is worshipped, but the essential feature of the religion is the enjoyment of union with the Divine nature through the indwelling of the Spirit of God. Belief in the transcendence of God has not been abandoned, but there has been added to it the complementary truth of the Divine immanence. The heart of the renewed man is God's throne, his body is God's temple.[2]

[1] G. Tyrrell, *Christianity at the Cross-Roads*, 223.
[2] A. J. Tait, *Christ and the Nations*, 219.

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